

Beyond the Stars

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BEYOND THE STARS

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BEYOND THE STARS :

OR,

HEAVEN,

ITS INHABITANTS, OCCUPATIONS, AND LIFE.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"OUR REST DAY," "HISTORY OF THE IRISH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH," ETC. ETC.

"Oh change! stupendous change!
Burst are the prison bars;
This moment there, so low, so agonized,
And now—BEYOND THE STARS!"

MRS. SOUTHEY.

FOURTH EDITION.

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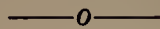
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PREFACE.



ONE or two matters about this work it seems necessary that I should explain to those who may honour it with a perusal.

First, let me disarm the critics beforehand by saying that it is a book for the people, and not a disquisition for the learned. Its object is to tell in plain, popular language all that can be gathered from the Bible regarding the glad but mysterious world which lies "beyond the stars." If any who cast their eyes over its pages are disappointed in it for this reason, I cannot help it. There are other works which will supply them with what they are in search of. For me, so far as this book is concerned, "I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue;" and the tongue of the theologian, who must perforce deal with strange languages and work out abstruse arguments, must be an unknown tongue to the plain English reader. I am quite content to walk among "the common people," and will have my sufficient reward if they "hear me gladly" on my theme.

It seems needful also that I should say that the successive chapters of the book were originally delivered as a series of Sunday-evening lectures. This will account for much in their style and contents which might otherwise appear strange, and will also explain the absence of many things. I have not thought it wise to deprive the work of this its original character to any great extent. It seemed to me that the trouble of doing so would have been ill repaid, and very probably might have ended in more hurt than service both to the book and its readers. As a matter of fact, it was the deep interest which my talks with my people about "the better land" awakened, when delivered from the pulpit, that suggested to me the thought of their publication. When I saw how men crowded to hear about the heavenly home, and with what unflagging eagerness they drank in all that they could be told about it, it seemed to me a pity not to yield to the requests which came from many quarters to commit what I had said on the subject to the press, that others might share in whatever profit or enjoyment my words might give. There is a great hunger for information about the other world. Is it not well if one can at all satisfy it and turn it to good account? Whatever God has seen right to tell us about the celestial country, we ought surely to try to know.

That I obtained light and help from many quarters, while trying to find out what is "beyond the stars," goes, of course, without saying. I sought such light

and help everywhere that I thought I could find them, and am under many an obligation in consequence. In the text such obligations will be found acknowledged from time to time. I feel, however, that I ought specially to mention here two works which deal with portions of the subject which I have essayed to treat in this volume—*Our Friends in Heaven*, and *Our Companions in Glory*, by the late Rev. James M. Killen, D.D., Comber.

These are all the matters which I have to explain to my readers before asking them to enter with me upon the investigation of the subject of my book. My hope is that it may bring “the land that is very far off” a little nearer, help them to see their title to it a little more clearly, and comfort them with some brighter glimpses than perhaps they have got elsewhere, of the bliss in which any whom they have lost may be “beyond the stars.”

BROOKVALE HOUSE, BELFAST,
October 1888.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

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IF additional proof were wanting of the deep and widespread interest which is felt in the mystery of the unseen world which awaits us at last, it is afforded by the rapid sale of the first edition of this work. In a few months after publication it was out of print. A second is now sent forth, carefully revised, and with some alterations introduced into it, which, it is hoped, will be regarded by the reader as improvements. Practically the book remains unchanged.

QUEEN'S COLLEGE, BELFAST,
October 1889.

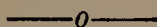
PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION.

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YET another edition of this work having been called for, I have once more gone carefully through it and have revised it where necessary. None of the views which I originally advanced on the subjects treated of, have, however, been altered. I am as firmly persuaded of their correctness now as when first I issued "Beyond the Stars," four years ago.

QUEEN'S COLLEGE, BELFAST,
November 1892.

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CHAPTER I.

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Introductory.

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INTRODUCTORY.

ALL ages and all nations have tried to penetrate behind the veil which hides the other world from us. What a charm speculation and discussion and vision about it had for the ancients, Egyptian "Book of the Dead" and Greek "Mystery," mystic legend of Minos and Rhadamanthus, of Elysium and Tartarus, of Acheron and Phlegethon, "Odyssey" of Homer and "Æneid" of Virgil, "Phaedon" and "Republic" and "Gorgias" of Plato, combine to tell us. The hold of men's minds which the "Inferno" gained and kept, shows how, centuries later, the subject had lost none of its fascination, while, in our own day, the popularity of such widely different books as Miss Phelps's "Gates Ajar," and Archdeacon Farrar's "Eternal Hope," proves that the thirst for knowledge on the subject is still unslaked. This desire to search into things unseen is not to be wondered at. There is no one of us who is not concerned with them. The youngest child has a stake in the heavenly country as well as the oldest saint.

For, first of all, most of us have friends in heaven—friends of whom we cannot help frequently thinking, picturing their condition and fancying how they are employed. We cannot but have many a thought about our fathers and mothers, our sisters and brothers, and our children, who have gone before us through the Valley of the Shadow. Wistfully and wonderingly we must inquire about them in our hearts. Those who have friends across the ocean in Australia or America do not forget them; which of us can forget the friends who are beyond the wider ocean which separates the heavenly shore from this? So you say,—

“Yes, talk to me of heaven; I love
To hear about the home above,
For there doth many a dear one dwell
In light and joy ineffable.

Oh, tell me how they shine and sing,
While every harp rings echoing,
And every glad and tearless eye
Beams like the bright sun gloriously!”

There is another reason which makes us take a deep interest in heaven—it is our home. A sweet Christian poet has taught us to sing,—

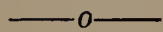
“I’m but a stranger here,
Heaven is my home;
Earth is a desert drear,
Heaven is my home.
Danger and sorrow stand
Around me on every hand;
Heaven is my fatherland,
Heaven is my home.”

The words are true. We are not at home here. We are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth." We are journeying towards home. We "nightly pitch our moving tent a day's march nearer home," and we hope one day to settle down there for ever. Now, if heaven is our home, how is it possible that we should not take the utmost interest in knowing all about it that we can know? The emigrant who intends going to a new world gathers all the information he can obtain regarding it before he sails. How glad he is to meet with people who have been there, and to hear all they can tell him of it! How carefully he inquires for the best guide-books, and how closely he scans their pages! Now, we cannot converse with any one who has been in the heavenly home. From its bourne no travellers return, or, if any do, they either tell nothing, or what they told is lost. Lazarus, and the widow's son of Nain, and Jairus's daughter, and Paul, and Elijah, and Moses all came back to earth after longer or shorter sojourns there, and we would give almost anything to hear the story of their visits. But we cannot. If we may not, however, talk with any who have visited the far country, we have a guide-book to it, and we can study that. What is the Bible but such a guide-book? And if, by conning our Murray or Baedeker, we prepare ourselves in advance for the foreign land to which we are going on business or pleasure, so as not to be altogether strangers to it or its ways when we arrive, we ought surely to make the same use of this other

better volume, not only for the purpose of knowing the way to the heavenly country, but of learning all that may be learned regarding the land itself. It is the authorized guide - book. It is "issued by authority," and we may therefore be sure that all its information is reliable. These pages will have served their purpose if they point out what it really tells us of this "undiscovered country." Their arguments will be based upon it, as the only real and infallible source of information on the subject. Their appeal will be "to the law and to the testimony;" and if they "speak not according to this Word," there will be indeed "no light" in them.

This, then, is our object in this inquiry—to know all we can of that wonderful land "beyond the stars," of its inhabitants, its ways, its life. God speed us in the task!

CHAPTER II.



A Settling of Localities.

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A SETTLING OF LOCALITIES.

THE first question we propose trying to answer is,—Is there such a place as heaven? Is there a definite locality, a distinctly defined region, where departed happy spirits dwell? Or, is heaven, as some seem to teach, only a state, a condition of blessedness, without reference to locality?

It is not very easy to understand precisely what is the meaning of this latter view. One would think that if souls exist after death at all, one of the most elementary truths regarding their state would be that they must exist somewhere. The choice would seem clearly to be between somewhere and nowhere, and nowhere would appear to be synonymous with non-existence. Still more, if our bodies are to live again after the resurrection, it would seem a necessity that they should live somewhere. But, however this may be, there are certainly people who have some such strange idea of heaven as that it is a state, as distinguished from a place. In their view it savours of materialism to connect it with either time or place. Its happiness is to them an abstract, indefinite thing, airy, unsubstantial, transcendental; a thing which

defies either investigation or definition, and refuses utterly to be tied down to any local habitation or name. I do not know that I can really grasp their idea. But if I can, it seems to me to involve something more than those who hold it intend. To my thinking, it appears to do away with heaven altogether, to dissolve it, not into the airy, unsubstantial, transcendental thing which they speak of, but into an airy, unsubstantial nothing,—a mirage, a dream.

But some one suggests, Is it not expressly said, "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke xvii. 21), and does not this statement seem to run in the direction of the position that heaven is some kind of state? As a matter of fact, the statement has no bearing whatever on the subject. In the first place, most modern interpreters now translate the words, not "The kingdom of God is within you;" but "The kingdom of God is among you;" *i.e.* it is already begun—not coming, but come; not future, but present. But, so far as we are concerned, it does not matter in the least whether this or the reading of the Authorized Version is adopted, for the words have not the remotest reference to the point which we are discussing. That point is,—Is heaven a place or not? and this passage does not bear upon that point, for the simple reason that it does not refer to heaven at all. No one with any understanding of Scripture would now think of saying that it does. The Pharisees were not talking about heaven when they put to our Lord the question which

elicited from Him this pregnant remark. What they wanted information about was, not heaven, but a very different thing, the time of the establishment of the Messianic kingdom. They were looking for such a kingdom, and they wanted to find out from Christ something as to the probable date of its commencement. "He was demanded of the Pharisees when the kingdom of God should come" (Luke xvii. 20). And His answer to their query dealt with the point on which they asked light, and not with the point with which we are here concerned. The passage has no connection whatever with the question whether heaven is a locality or not. Almost any text in the Bible might be quoted in regard to this question quite as appositely.

Yet it cannot be denied that there is still a good deal of truth in what Dr. Chalmers thus wrote half a century ago—"The common imagination that we have of the paradise on the other side of death is that of a lofty, aerial region, where the inmates float in ether, or are mysteriously suspended upon nothing; where all the warm and sensible accompaniments which give such an expression of strength and life and colouring to our present habitation, are attenuated into a sort of spiritual element that is meagre, and imperceptible, and utterly uninviting to the eye of mortals here below; where every vestige of materialism is done away, and nothing is left but certain unearthly scenes that have no power of allurements, and certain unearthly ecstasies with which it is felt

to be impossible to sympathize." The question is, —Are such ideas true to fact, or are they not? We believe they are not, and we give the following reasons for our belief:—

1. *If souls exist at all after death, they must exist somewhere.* This truth cannot be too often repeated or too clearly borne in mind. The soul is an entity. It must have a dwelling-place. The fact that it is invisible does not do away with the necessity for its having an abode. It is neither omnipresent on the one hand, nor non-present anywhere on the other. After death as much as before death, it must exist somewhere.

2. Still more clearly, the fact that *there will be material bodies in heaven* proves that it must be a place. That there are such bodies there is certain. Christ has a human body. That body must be in some definite place, and can only be in one place at one time.¹ Similarly, Enoch and Elijah, who were translated without seeing death, have bodies, and those bodies must be in some place. Moreover, at the Great Day we shall all assume again the garments of the body, laid off at death; and those bodies will be real bodies, and will demand a real place in which to dwell. No doubt the resurrection body will be different in certain respects from that which we now possess. In what the differences will consist we shall see at a subsequent part of these discussions.

¹ For various opinions regarding the nature of our Lord's risen body, *vide* Westcott's *Gospel of the Resurrection*, 239; Stier's *Words of Christ*, viii. 151; Bengel's *Gnomon*, iv. 476.

Here we merely state the fact that it will still be a material body, which is all we require to know for our present purpose. Being a material body, the resurrection body must have a material place in which to dwell. This is surely clear beyond peradventure.

3. Again, *heaven is expressly called a place in Holy Scripture.* "I go," Christ says, "to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John xiv. 2, 3). Judas, when he died, went to "his own place" below; so the saints at death wing their flight to their own place above. There are multitudes of passages to this effect. Our Lord speaks of heaven constantly as a definite locality. "Take heed," He says, "that ye despise not one of these little ones: for I say unto you, that in heaven" (surely a definite place is here indicated) "their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. xviii. 10). To the dying thief He said, "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke xxiii. 43),—again surely meaning a definite locality, as much as did Paul when he told his readers at Corinth that he "was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Cor. xii. 4). If words mean anything, there is only one conclusion to be drawn from such statements as these, and that conclusion is that somewhere in the universe of God there is a place called heaven, a

material place fitted for the occupation of material bodies, a place as real as this earth on which we now dwell. We may not be able to tell precisely where this place is. Our telescopes, which search so far into the starry depths, cannot discover it to us, and all our reasoning may not be able to indicate its exact locality. But as to the fact that somewhere this bright spot does exist, the place to which Jesus ascended on that memorable day when He led the disciples out "as far as to Bethany, . . . and was parted from them, and carried up into heaven" (Luke xxiv. 50, 51); the place to which Enoch ascended when "he was translated that he should not see death, and was not found because God had translated him" (Heb. xi. 5); the place to which Elijah was carried in his fiery chariot right up from the banks of Jordan; and to which our own departed friends winged their flight when they fell asleep in Jesus,—we need entertain no more doubt than we do of the existence of this earth on which we now walk. Most certainly—

“There is a land of pure delight,
Where saints immortal reign;
Infinite day excludes the night,
And pleasures banish pain.
Oh, could we make our doubts remove—
Those gloomy doubts that rise,
And see the Canaan that we love,
With unclouded eyes,—
Could we but climb where Moses stood,
And view the landscape o’er;
Not Jordan’s stream, nor death’s cold flood
Should fright us from the shore!”

Whatever else we may not be clear about, this we need not doubt,—there is a heaven as surely as there is an earth.

II. Let us now look at a second point. We have seen that heaven is certainly a place. Let us see if we can discover anything as to where this place is. The fact that there is such a place will not, of course, be affected by the result of such an inquiry. Although entertaining no doubt of its existence, it is quite possible that we may not be able to identify it. Whether we can or not remains to be seen.

Our difficulties begin here. We have had no difficulty in arriving at the certain conclusion that there is a definite locality called heaven. But Holy Writ nowhere tells us, in so many words, where this place is situated. Yet we cannot help asking the question. We echo the child's words,—

“ I hear thee speak of the better land ;
Thou callest its children a happy band ;
Mother ! oh, where is that radiant shore ?
Shall we not seek it, and weep no more ? ”

Moreover, we not only ask the question—we answer it, whether we are aware that we are doing so or not. In our own minds we arrive at settled conclusions on the subject, consciously or unconsciously. Probably there is not one of us who has not his own ideas regarding it. Of the existence of these ideas we are not perhaps aware until we begin to inquire into them. But we have them.

What are some of these ideas? They vary much.

1. Many people have no further notion of the locality of heaven than that it is *somewhere in the sky*. Put the question to any company of ordinary people—where is heaven? and probably nine out of every ten will point upward. It does not seem to occur to them that, supposing they do this at twelve o'clock noon, and again, in answer to the same question at twelve o'clock midnight, repeat the action, they are really, at an interval of only twelve hours, indicating two exactly opposite localities. Yet such is of course the fact. In those twelve hours the earth has wheeled right round, so that the point which was above our heads at noon is at midnight directly beneath our feet. Heaven cannot plainly be in both directions. So this answer to the question may at once be dismissed. It is, in fact, no answer at all.

2. A reply which is at first sight more plausible is given by those who think that *this earth*, cleansed by the fires of the final conflagration, is to be the heaven of the saints. They point us to such passages as 2 Pet. iii. 10: "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up. . . . The heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

In Rev. xxi. 1 we read again: "I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea." The conclusion drawn from such passages is that heaven will be this earth transformed.

On such Scriptures, and on the theory based upon them, we remark,—

(a) The passages just quoted not only do not say in so many words that the seat of heaven is to be the renovated earth, but their language indicates the contrary meaning. There are to be "new heavens" as well as a "new earth." But there is no indication in the language, either of St. Peter or St. John, of any such distinction being intended for this present earth. Rather the contrary, whether we take the language literally or figuratively.

(b) It is the uniform teaching of Scripture that heaven, the heaven where Christ is and where His people are to be, is in existence now. It is so spoken of continually. Heaven was in existence at the time of Christ's birth, for angels came down out of it to herald that grand event. It was in existence at the time of His death, for He told the dying thief that he would be with Him there that same day. It was in existence at the time of His ascension, for "He ascended up into heaven" in the view of His disciples. It was in existence on the day of Stephen's martyrdom, for he looked into heaven when he was dying. It was in existence in Paul's time, for he was caught up into it. Moreover, if heaven is yet

to be fashioned, where are Enoch and Elijah now? And where is Christ's body now? And where are all the glorified saints? Besides, is not Christ already at work preparing the place for us? (John xiv. 2). Unless we are to believe in two heavens, one already existing, and another for which the present heaven is to be exchanged, a notion of which Scripture gives no hint, it is simply impossible to believe that our earth is to be heaven, and one can only wonder that any one ever conceived that it could be.

(c) Once more, on the supposition that heaven is to be this earth transformed by the last fires, what, we may ask, is to become of the bodies of the saints, which have been raised from the grave, in the interval during which the globe is to be wrapped in those flames? For mark the sequence of events required by the theory. First, the General Judgment takes place, "all the dead, small and great," having been raised from their sleep by the archangel's trump, and clothed with their bodies again, to stand before the Great White Throne. When they have been judged and sentenced, then ensues this final fire, which, according to the theory we are considering, is to purge our earth and fit it to be a home for the saints. But what, we say, becomes of those saints during the progress of the conflagration, and until the earth has sufficiently cooled down to permit of habitation?—and we are told by those who hold this theory that it must require thousands of years before another solid crust could be formed upon its surface

capable of sustaining organic life. The saints must either remain in the midst of those awful fires, or they must be removed elsewhere until they are over. Some advocates of the theory are bold enough to maintain the former of these alternatives. The bodies of the saints, they tell us, will be of such a nature as to be able to live unharmed in the midst of flame. Fancy heaven begun in fire! Is not the very conception its own sufficient refutation? But if, on the other hand, the saints are removed, until that last fire has done its work, into another place, then we have another theory to which Scripture gives no countenance—the theory of a temporary heaven, only to be occupied till the real heaven is ready. In such confusion and violence to Scripture does this hypothesis inevitably land us.

(*d*) Again, is it not clear that the uniform tendency of the Bible mode of speaking on this subject of heaven is to turn our thoughts away from earth altogether to some outside and different region? Heaven and earth are there always opposed. They are two different and distinct entities. Our affections are summoned from the things on earth to the things in heaven. The happiness of the saints is “reserved in heaven,” not promised us to come out of the earth. The only mode in which it is possible to reconcile this style of speech with the theory which we are considering, is to resort to the idea that the final heaven of the after-judgment is to be different from the present heaven where Christ is, into which He

has gone for the express purpose of preparing a place for His people,—an idea which, as we have already seen, is utterly untenable. Notwithstanding the respect, therefore, which we have for some of those who hold and advocate the doctrine that heaven is to be on this earth, we are compelled to believe on every ground that this is not only not taught in Scripture, but is in plain and strong opposition to its teaching. Wherever heaven is, it is certainly not to be sought here below.

3. There is another view of this matter which has been advocated with great ability by some, and which is held unconsciously by many more, viz. that heaven lies all about us; that the spirits of the departed hover in the air round this earth, lingering over the scenes which they once inhabited, so that in reality, though invisible, they are perhaps as near us in death as they were in life. Isaac Taylor seems to have held some such opinion. In his *Physical Theory of Another Life*, he conjectures that “within the space occupied by the visible and ponderable universe, and on all sides of us, there is existing and moving another element fraught with another species of life, corporeal indeed and various in its orders, but not open to the cognizance of those who are confined to the conditions of animal organization, not to be seen, nor to be heard, nor to be felt by man. Our present conjecture reaches to the extent of supposing that, within the space encircled by the sidereal revolutions, there exists and moves a second universe, not less real than the

one we are at present conversant with,—a universe elaborate in structure and replete with life, a universe conscious, perhaps, of the material spheres, or unconscious of them, and believing itself to be the only reality. Our planets in their sweep do not perforate the structure of this invisible creation, our suns do not scorch its plains, for the two collateral systems are not connected by any active affinities.”

Now all this is very ingenious. But it is pure conjecture. There is not a particle of evidence for it. It may be fine fancy, but it is only fancy. Besides, it is quite opposed to the conclusions which we have drawn already from various scriptures, to the effect that heaven is no vague, tenuous region, “where the inmates float in ether or are mysteriously suspended upon nothing,” but is a definitely defined locality, as real and palpable as this earth itself, a material place fitted for the abode of material bodies. These objections to the theory are insuperable; and there are others still weightier, which will appear by and by, and which combine with them to disprove it utterly.

4. It is the beautiful idea of some that the abode of the departed now, and their and our future home throughout eternity, is to be found in some of those stars which, on a clear night, we see twinkling in space. Modern astronomy has made many of these heavenly bodies very real to us. The powerful telescopes with which we are now familiar have brought them wonderfully near, and the discoveries of spectrum analysis have made us acquainted with

their very composition. As the eminent astronomer, Mr. R. A. Proctor, says: "Thus we are led to a number of interesting conclusions even respecting orbs which no telescope that man can construct is likely to reveal to his scrutiny. The existence of such elements as sodium or calcium in those other worlds suggests the probable existence of the familiar compounds of these metals—soda, salt, lime, and so on. Again, the existence of iron and other metals of the same class carries our minds to the various useful purposes which these metals are made to subserve on the earth. We are at once invited to recognise that the orbs circling around those distant suns are not meant merely to be the abode of life, but that intelligent creatures, capable of applying these metals to useful purposes, must exist in those worlds. We need not conclude, indeed, that at the present moment every one of those worlds is peopled with intelligent beings, because we have good reason for believing that throughout an enormous proportion of the time during which our earth has existed as a world, no intelligent use has been made of the supplies of metal existing in her substance. But that at some time or other those worlds have been or will be the abode of intelligent creatures, seems to be a conclusion very fairly deducible from what we now know of their probable structure" (*Other Worlds than Ours*, 247). No wonder that many people have therefore placed heaven in some of those distant worlds.

There is one passage of Scripture, however, which appears to us to do away with the possibility of such a thing,—the only passage which to our mind gives any clue whatever to the situation of heaven. It is Eph. iv. 8-10: "Wherefore He saith, When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things." The reference here is, of course, to our blessed Lord, and the point bearing on our subject which is brought out in the passage is this, that the place to which He ascended on that memorable day when the disciples watched His form floating upward from the Mount of Olives was somewhere "far above all heavens," or, as the Revised Version more properly renders it, "far above all the heavens." Now the place to which He thus winged His flight was plainly the true heaven,—the Paradise to which the penitent thief had gone, and the place which Christ is preparing for His people,—the place to which they will all go to be with Christ, "that where He is there they may be also." The heaven where Christ is, is therefore situated "far above all the heavens." It is not to be sought on earth, nor in any of the visible regions round about earth, nor in any of the nearer heavenly bodies. It is far beyond all these—"far above all the heavens."

Clearly to understand the significance of this phrase,

we must remember what Grotius tells us, viz. that the Jews of St. Paul's day recognised the existence of three regions which they called heavens. The first and lowest was the *Cælum nubiferum*, where the clouds float and the birds fly. The second and next highest was the *Cælum astriferum*, the region of the stars. The third and loftiest of all was the *Cælum empyreum*, the great unexplored realm of space beyond. But, says this passage which is before us, heaven is "far above" all these regions, high above the clouds, above the stars of our system, above the remotest region to which the ken of the astronomer can pierce. Now, this single statement surely disproves all the theories which locate the abode of the blest either on earth, or round about it, or in any of the nearer heavenly bodies. Wherever it is, it lies "far above" all these regions—"far above all the heavens." When the Redeemer left Olivet that day on His homeward journey, He floated upward through the soft summer air until, as the sacred record states, "the clouds received Him out of their sight." For a little we can follow Him in thought in His flight. Upward He is wafted, beyond star after star, and planet after planet—still upward, past all the most remote bodies of our system, till at last neither sight nor thought can follow Him farther—on, on, "far above all the heavens," and not till He has left them all behind Him does He reach "the land which is very far off," where He is still, and where we hope to be with Him when the time comes for our depar-

ture to be "for ever with the Lord." This passage seems to us to scatter to the winds many a dreamy conjecture regarding heaven. If it leaves us still in uncertainty on many points, it at least saves us from cherishing misapprehensions in which we might otherwise be led to indulge through listening to airy and fine-spun theories which ignore its existence.

Does it help us any further? It tells us, with no uncertain sound, where heaven is not, and tells us, moreover, in what direction it is to be looked for, if it is to be found at all. Has it any more information on the subject for us? Let us see.

There is one view of its teaching which is at all events worth stating.

Every one knows that the earth revolves round the sun. Every one also knows that the sun has a revolution of its own on its own axis. But it is not so generally known that, in addition to these two motions, the entire solar system, including the sun, the earth, and all the other related planets and satellites, is sweeping through space with a velocity which is almost inconceivable. This motion was first discovered by the celebrated astronomer Sir William Herschel more than a hundred years ago, and its existence has long since been clearly demonstrated by the researches and observations of such men as Argelander, Otto Struve, Mädler, and Airy. We now know, not only the fact of this motion, but we also know the direction in which, led by the sun, and accompanied by our sister planets, we are all travel-

ling by means of it, and we know, too, at what rate we are going.

Every one who has swept the midnight sky with his telescope is familiar with the constellation Hercules. In that remarkable group of stars is one known to astronomers as π , and it is towards this star that our sun and all his system are speeding with a velocity, causing them, we are told, to travel over the enormous distance of thirty-three millions three hundred and fifty thousand miles every year. Now, it is the opinion of eminent authorities that in this motion our system is really performing a revolution round a central sun, which is to it and to all other systems of the starry heavens what our sun is to us. To enter here into the arguments on the subject, or to explain the mode in which the conclusion referred to has been reached, would be impossible and out of place. I can only indicate the results which have been arrived at, and even these very briefly.

Most people know the Pleiades, of whose "sweet influences" (Job xxxviii. 31) the Old Testament revisers have robbed us. In that remarkable group of stars is one named Alcyone, its principal member, and this distant orb is declared to be the central sun about which the universe of stars comprising our whole astral system revolves. So distant is Alcyone from our sun that it takes a ray of his light over five hundred years to reach it, and over eighteen millions of years are required to perform

one revolution round it. The figures are bewildering in their immensity. The whole conception indeed is so stupendous,—the conception of all the suns and all the systems of the universe governed by this great central sun, and sweeping silently and continually round it, through long cycles of years, that our utmost efforts can scarcely grasp it. Now, this great central sun is, as it were, the capital of the universe. It governs all the rest, and it is at least a beautiful theory, if nothing more, that it is the seat of heaven. What if here be erected, so far as locality can be supposed to be connected therewith, the throne of God? What if in this magnificent world, which is indeed “far, far away” to a degree unconceived when the “happy land” is sung of in our children’s familiar hymn, be the place of which our Master made on our behalf the memorable request—“Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which Thou hast given me” (John xvii. 24)? To dogmatize on the subject would, of course, be folly. But if, as we hope we have proved, there be a definite locality called heaven, if this heaven cannot possibly be on this earth, or in any of the celestial bodies which circle immediately near it, if it is, as the apostle declares, “far above all the heavens,” may it not possibly be that in this grand central metropolis of the universe is to be found “that radiant shore” which we think of and speak of as “the better land”?

CHAPTER III.

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GOD.

WE have now, as it were, sighted the heavenly world. We have clearly ascertained that there is such a "better country." Though we are not able to fix its exact position with any certainty, as one can fix upon the map the position of an earthly region, yet we are as sure that somewhere among the multitude of worlds which God has made, somewhere in the unexplored regions of space, there is such a "land of pure delight," as Columbus was, in the fifteenth century, that a new world lay beyond the ocean in the then undiscovered West. He had never seen that new world. Neither have we seen heaven. But, though we have not seen, we believe in its existence, and are as sure that, after our rough voyage over the sea of time, we shall land upon its shores, as he was that sooner or later he would reach the great continent on which at last he set foot.

We now want to know something of the inhabitants of the heavenly country. As the sailor, when his telescope has revealed to him the dim outlines of

some hitherto unknown island, lowers his pinnace, and, sailing cautiously and curiously toward it, tries to make out what manner of people it contains, so, now that we have gained a glimpse of heaven, we too must endeavour to learn what we can of its denizens. Oh for eyes anointed with God's own eye-salve to see them !

We begin with the Highest—the dread Sovereign of heaven. Let us pause for a moment before we advance towards Him. For we must tread reverently and carefully. “Put off thy shoes from off thy feet,” O reader, “for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.” “For who in the heaven can be compared unto Jehovah? who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto Jehovah? God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all those that are about Him. O Lord God of Hosts, who is a strong Lord like unto Thee, or to Thy faithfulness round about Thee?” There must be here no indulging of mere unsanctified curiosity—no seeking to gratify a prying, prurient inquisitiveness. If, like Moses, we say, with all holy awe, to the Most High, “I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory,” we must hear the same dread voice speaking to us which spoke ages ago to him—“Go down, charge the people lest they break through unto the Lord *to gaze*, and many of them perish.”

Of course there is a God. We are not concerned here with the proofs that there is. If we were

arguing with an atheist it would be necessary to consider them, and we should have no lack of proofs to submit to him. We should point him to the universe,—to this earth, with all its marvellous products and potencies, to the other worlds on worlds which the telescope reveals to us, to the myriads of beings which we see by the aid of the microscope, and we should ask—Who made all these? Every effect has a cause. Where is the great First Cause of all these wonderful effects? Or we should ply him with the argument from design, of which we must never allow any specious philosophy to rob us, and ask him to consider his own bodily frame, so fearfully and wonderfully made, with so many nice adaptations and exquisite adjustments, every organ perfect and complete, wanting nothing, and we should ask—Whence all this? Who designed it? Who fashioned it? Paley's watch, found on the moor, did not more certainly proclaim a watchmaker, by its manifest proof of design and contrivance and means adapted to end, than does the world proclaim a world-maker, and man a creator, to the thoughtful and unbiassed mind. Napoleon I. was far from being a distinctively religious man, but the quiet rebuke which he administered to a group of his officers, on whom he came by surprise one night during the progress of the expedition to Egypt, as they sat on the quarterdeck of one of the ships of the squadron, conversing in tones evidently tinctured with the prevalent infidelity of France, proved that he had

at least discernment enough to see the folly of the notion that all this great system of things has no cause. The story has been often told, but it will bear repeating. Striding into the midst of them, and pointing up to the moon and stars, which beamed down upon ship and sea from a cloudless sky: "Gentlemen," he said, "who made all these?" It were well if many who profess to doubt or deny the existence of the great First Cause would allow themselves to hear and answer Buonaparte's question. "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God," and surely a fool he proclaims himself by the very thought.

But we are not dealing with atheists just now, and it would take us away from our purpose to enlarge on the proofs of the being of a God. We "believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth." Believe? Do we not know that He is? Should we not as soon think of doubting our own existence as His? But let me ask a question. You believe in God,—you know He exists,—have you ever tried to form a mental conception of Him? I say a conception, not an image. You could not form an image of Him in your mind. But have you ever tried to think God—to conceive to yourself His mysterious Presence? Perhaps you say that too is impossible. Then eternal life is impossible. For "this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." Certainly, complete knowledge of Him is impossible. The old question, "Canst

thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" must as certainly be answered in the negative now as it was in the days of Job. The finite can never wholly grasp the infinite: the creature need never hope fully to know the Creator. As soon might the fly, which creeps over the page which a Newton is studying, comprehend all the mighty problems which are passing through the philosopher's brain while he reads, as we, moving about here on the surface of this globe, expect to understand all the mind of God. But know Him we must. We cannot help conceiving Him in our minds in some way. Men have erred in forming material representations of Him. These are, and must always be, not only sinful but absurd. "Forasmuch as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold or silver or stone, graven by art and man's device" (Acts xvii. 29). But that is no reason why we should not form a proper representation—a mental representation—not a picture, not an image, either mental or material, but a conception fitted to give substance and reality to our thoughts and ideas about Him. Have you ever tried to form such a true conception? Have you ever sat down, and with closed eyes, and minds closed also against all outward things and influences, and only open above, tried to think your God? If not, will you let me help you to do so now?

First of all, the thought of God must not be the

thought of any bodily shape. On Tuesday morning, 22nd September 1646, the "Minutes" of the Westminster Divines, then sitting in the Jerusalem Chamber at Westminster Abbey, tell us that they put before themselves this question for solution—"Hath God any body, or is He to be seen with bodily eyes?" In a little while they formulated this answer—"God is a Spirit, invisible, without body or bodily parts, not like a man or any other creature." They could come to no other conclusion with the Bible in their hands, and giving it the undivided allegiance which was one of the most marked characteristics of those eminent men. True, we read in Scripture of God's eyes, His ears, His hands, and so forth. But we all know that these are metaphorical expressions. "God is a Spirit," and "a spirit hath not flesh and bones." As we sit trying to imagine what heaven is like, and to conceive to ourselves its great Sovereign, we must not therefore think of any bodily shape. On the contrary, we must most carefully and completely eliminate such a thought from our conception, if we would have it true.

But then, on the other hand, we must beware of rushing into the opposite extreme, and, while believing that we believe in God, losing any conception of Him that is of any worth by evaporating the Godhead into any of the profound nothings which are all that some would leave us in these days. He is something more than simple Being, something more than inscrutable Force or mere Causality. We cannot be

contented with being told that He is the unknown and unknowable Cause of all things, still less with hearing that God is simply another name for the moral order of the universe, or that He can only be defined as a Power not ourselves which makes for righteousness. Yet men's ideas often seem to oscillate between these two extremes—the extreme of thinking of God as a visible being, conceived of and represented in visible forms varying according to the bent of their own minds, and the other, perhaps not less dangerous, extreme of whittling away the conception of Godhead to some tenuous and intangible abstraction worth nothing. There is Substance in God. And there is Personality. He is neither unthinkable nor unknowable. He is not a mere Influence diffused mysteriously through space. True, He is incomprehensible. We cannot know Him perfectly. There will always be infinitely more in Him than we can either conceive or express. But know Him we can, and know Him correctly, though partially. It is difficult to put the truth on the matter into words. But what I desire to convey is this—God is. He is a veritable God, not a vague, mystic impersonality, nor mere idea, nor power, but as really a living Being as we are (rather infinitely more really); a personal Being, a Being to be known, to be loved, to be obeyed, to be served; a Being who lives, who loves, who acts, who governs.

But when this has been said, and when we would think further of God, difficulties thicken

round us. We can sympathise with Simonides, who, when asked by Hiero of Syracuse, "What is God?" desired a day to consider the question. When that was over, he asked two days more. When these were ended, he besought four, so continuing to double the days each time his reply was sought, till the king asked him what he meant by such strange conduct. "The more I think of God," he replied, "the more He is still unknown to me." But there is much that we can know of Him, and it is obviously our duty to know all we can of One "whom to know is life everlasting."

Where, however, shall we go for information? Not much is to be learned from the Divine names used in Scripture,—the Adonai, or the El, or Elah, or Elohim, or Eloah, or Jehovah, or El Shaddai of the Hebrew of the Old Testament; or the Theos or Kurios of the Greek of the New—and still less from our English names for the Supreme Being. The very derivation of our word God is disputed. It is identical with Good, say some. God is the Good One. But the latest authorities tell us that this old idea is quite erroneous, and that the name is of unknown origin. Even if we knew its etymology for certain, we should gain no more than an idea of what were the thoughts of the old Saxons about God. We must carefully search the Scriptures for light as to what the Supreme Being really is, and probably the best summary anywhere to be found of their teaching on the point is that given us in the Shorter

Catechism of the Westminster Assembly in answer to the question, "What is God?" The beautiful traditional story of the composition of this answer, which connects it with the name of George Gillespie, must probably be abandoned, however much we may regret the necessity. But, whatever be its history, the answer itself stands unrivalled—"God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth." Every word here is pregnant with meaning.

"God is a Spirit," or better, perhaps, both in grammar and theology, "God is Spirit." This is "the profoundest word in human language," Stier well says. What does it mean? It means for one thing, that God is immaterial. None of the properties of matter can be predicated of Him. Moreover, He is not only immaterial, but incorporeal. "A spirit hath not flesh and bones." But yet He is personal. He is a real living Being. He is an "Infinite" Being, however. In all respects He is without limits or bounds. He fills heaven and earth. As Trismegistus sublimely said, He is "a circle whose centre is everywhere, but His circumference nowhere." Or, as David still more sublimely sings, "If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there: if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me." And He is "Eternal."

There never was a time when He was not; there never will be a time when He will not be. As He is above and beyond all the limitations of space, so He is above and beyond all the limitations of time. "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting Thou art God!" "Of old hast Thou laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Thy hands! They shall perish, but Thou shalt endure; yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed. But Thou art the same, and Thy years shall have no end!" Nor can He ever become what He is not now. He is "Unchangeable," the same for evermore both in essence and attributes, subject to no process of development or self-evolution, still less to any decrease or diminution of any kind. His lofty description of Himself is, "I am the Lord; I change not." Moreover, as these three, Infinity, Eternity, and Immutability, are to be predicated of His essence, so are they to be predicated of His attributes. He is infinitely, eternally, and immutably wise; infinitely, eternally, and immutably powerful; infinitely, eternally, and immutably holy; infinitely, eternally, and immutably just; infinitely, eternally, and immutably good; and infinitely, eternally, and immutably true. "Great is our Lord, and of great power; His understanding is infinite." The cry of His worshippers must ever be, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!" "Just and

true are Thy ways, Thou King of Saints!" We must describe Him as He described Himself,—
"The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty."

This is a description of God—His own description of Himself. But when we have received it, and believed it, our difficulties are far from over. What else can we expect but difficulties when dealing with such a theme? We are handling the sublimest, the most transcendently grand subject that the mind of man could think of, and we, poor creatures of a day, need not be surprised if at every step we are confronted by problems regarding it which make the brain reel, and almost drive us back, in despair of ever gaining any comprehension of the subject we have undertaken to inquire into. God would not be God if it were otherwise.

For example, there are three Persons in this great Godhead. Not three Gods—only one. Nor yet three persons in the same sense as any three of us are persons. The word person, indeed, is in this case inadequate to express all that it is intended to convey; but neither ancient theology nor modern has been able to find a better, and so we must be content with it. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are true Persons, yet utterly unlike any other personalities we have ever known. "In modern

philosophical usage, the term person means a separate and distinct rational individual. But the tri-personality of God is not a numerical or essential trinity of three beings, like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for this would be Tritheism; nor is it only, on the other hand, merely a threefold aspect and mode of manifestation in the Sabellian or Swedenborgian sense, but it is a real, objective, and eternal, though ineffable, distinction in one divine being" (Schaff, *Creeds*, ii. 70). These three are distinct Persons, for one speaks to the other, loves the other, commands the other. Yet they are one, for "The Lord our God is one Lord." There is a subordination amongst them, for the Father is first, the Son second, and the Holy Spirit third; the Son is of the Father, and the Holy Spirit of the Father and the Son; the Father sends the Son, and the Father and Son send the Holy Spirit; the Father works through the Son, and the Father and Son work through the Holy Spirit. The Son never sends the Father, nor the Holy Spirit the Son. Yet, in spite of this distinction and order and subordination, all three are perfectly and entirely equal, and the same in substance. You say you cannot understand this. It seems to you incomprehensible. Is it extraordinary if it is? Does it in this respect differ from many other truths, some of them truths of Scripture, and some merely truths of ordinary everyday life? You and I are surrounded by incomprehensibilities wherever we go. Our life in this body, our souls,

the connection between the thinking part within us and the corporeal frame — who can comprehend these? Who indeed can comprehend the very growth of a common blade of grass by the roadside? Much more, surely, we may expect to find great depths of mystery in the nature and being of the Most High. Could we believe that He is God if there were no mysteries about Him—if everything within and around Him was plain and level to our feeble comprehension? Surely not. So, awestruck as we are, and must ever be, by the mystery of the great doctrine of the Trinity, which utterly transcends our puny intellects, and towers above us like some great Alp at whose base we stand gazing and wondering, while its head is hidden among the clouds, we yet cry, “I cannot understand it, but I must believe it,” and with humbled, chastened, awestruck minds, and bated breath, we blend our voices in the general creed of Christendom, and say, “I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord . . . I believe in the Holy Ghost.”

With the added light which we have now got, let us in thought put our feet reverently upon the holy soil of heaven, and look upon God. What do we see? Conceive the sight if you can. There is the Father, whom no man hath seen at any time, whom no man can see, who dwells in light to which none can approach. There is the Holy Ghost, that mystic Person who, ever since the morning when He brooded

over the waters which lay dead and dark, in leaden sullenness, over chaos, has been working with mysterious might, continually bringing life out of death. But, lo, a third glorious Personage! Our eyes, strained and dazzled by gazing upon incorporeal spirits, rest upon a bodily form. But such a body! A glory beams from within and all around it. But see! What are those marks upon the brow? They seem the imprint of some thorny circlet which has been pressed rudely, and of purpose, down upon it. The hands, too! Look at them! In each palm a gash, piercing right through. And the feet! Each is similarly marked. Oh! it is Jesus Christ, and, as He moves about among the shining throng, every knee is prostrated in adoration.

“Lo! elders worship at His feet;
The Church adores around,
With vials full of odours rich,
And harps of sweetest sound.”

But stop a moment, some one says; there is something in what you say which we cannot understand. You have spoken of God as visible in heaven. Now, is it not the uniform representation of Scripture that He is invisible? Is not invisibility, in fact, one of His attributes? Is He not “the King eternal, immortal, invisible”? Is not one of His names “the invisible God”? And have there not been quoted already such statements as—“No man hath seen God at any time;” “Whom no man hath seen or can see”? How, then, speak of seeing in heaven

a Being who is expressly declared to be unseen and unseeable ?

Now, if these Scripture statements mean that the Divine Being is in His very nature invisible, and can never be otherwise, then, of course, we freely grant that the meditation in which we have just been indulging is only fancy. To say that what is essentially and invariably invisible can never be seen, is, of course, a truism. But is that the correct representation of the case ? With all reverence and humility, we submit that it cannot be. For God has been visible more than once or twice in man's history. He appeared to Abraham on several occasions. "Jehovah appeared to Abraham" (Gen. xii. 7),—so runs the record. He appeared, too, to Jacob, to Moses, to Manoah, and others ; and Isaiah expressly says—"I saw the Lord" (Isa. vi. 1). But, you reply, were not those appearances visions of Christ, the only-begotten Son who "hath declared Him," while the Father is unseen and invisible ? Supposing this were so, is the matter settled ? Let it be remembered that our blessed Lord had not assumed human nature at the times now spoken of. It could not, therefore, have been in that human nature that He appeared, if those appearances were His appearances ; and if invisibility is an essential and invariable attribute of the Divine Being, then Christ is and was invisible as well as the Father. But if one Divine Person has been visible, what becomes of the position that all three are invisible ?

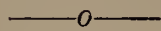
So much for what has occurred in the past. What are we told about the present? Why, Christ expressly says—"In heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven." There is certainly no ascription of invisibility in this passage. We are most concerned here, however, with the great future. What of it? Is it or is it not said that God will be seen by the saints in glory? Let Scripture give the answer in its own words—"Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty." Job cried—"Though, after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God; whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold and not another, though my reins be consumed within me!" David says—"As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness." John says—"We shall see Him as He is;" and the apocalyptic angel, in one of those glowing descriptions of heaven which he gave to the lonely exile of Patmos, and which have thrilled the hearts of readers ever since they were put on record, expressly mentions as one of its chief glories, that "they shall see His face." In view of all this testimony from past, present, and future, are we to maintain the essential and everlasting invisibility of the Divine Being as an article of the faith? How can we?

What, then, you say, is the meaning of the repeated pronouncements as to God's invisibility? And how are those pronouncements to be harmonized

with the facts as to divine appearances which we have mentioned? It seems to us that both the explanation and harmonization are very simple and easy. God is invisible to man in man's present imperfect state. But "when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away," and we shall see even as we are seen, and know even as we are known. "No man hath seen God at any time," unless God was pleased, under special circumstances, to render Himself visible. He dwells "in the light which no man can approach unto." The blaze of that light would be too much for mortal eyes. Hence the solemn charge to Moses about the Israelites—"Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish." When Isaiah had his splendid vision of God, he groaned out—"Woe is me! for I am undone, . . . for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts;" and John, when he saw his Lord, "fell at His feet as dead." But in heaven it is and will be otherwise. The beautiful vision of God's face will there not only be possible, but will constitute one of the chief joys. This body of our humiliation, which clogs and confines us so much now, will be gone. We shall be "like Him," with bodies made "like unto Christ's own glorious body," and souls purified and cleansed. That which, from the necessities of our fallen nature, renders the invisibility of the Divine Being at once a mercy and a privation, will then be done away, and, being done

away, the scales which have hidden the great God from us for so long shall drop from our eyes; and who can paint or imagine the bliss or wonder of the first moment when we shall see in the land of glory "the King in His beauty"? That we shall, is as certain as that we shall be there.

CHAPTER IV.



The Cherubim.

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THE CHERUBIM.

IN the journey of exploration which we are supposing ourselves to make, we have now arrived in heaven, and have gone right up to the throne of God. We have gazed, so far as mortal eyes can now gaze, on Him "whom no man hath seen or can see." Let us now look at the various orders of beings, inferior to Him, superior to us, which descend in ever-receding ranks, like the various courses of masonry in some great pyramid, from Him, the crowning apex, down to ourselves, the lowermost order of the rational creation. As we do so it will be strange if we are not lost in wonder at each new step, and strange, too, if there is not deepened in us a sense at once of humility and holy awe, as we see the distance, vast and awful, between us and the throne of the Eternal, and if, at the same time, there does not spring up in our breast a feeling of blessed confidence, as we think that this mighty and glorious God, whose majesty is so inconceivably magnificent, has been

brought near us in Christ, so that "this God is our God" for evermore.

That there are in the upper world various ranks of intelligences is clearly indicated in Holy Scripture. In Col. i. 16 we read of "thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers." In Eph. i. 20, 21, we are told of Christ having been raised from the dead and set at God's right hand "in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come;" and similarly in Rom. viii. 38, the same apostle tells us, in almost identical terms, of "angels, principalities, and powers." These passages are clear on the matter. They tell us of what we might have expected, that in heaven there are gradations of rank. It would be an exception to all God's creation if there were not such gradations. Here, on earth, no law can be more clearly traced than the great law of subordination. We have the organic kingdom rising above the inorganic, the animate ruling over the inanimate. At the bottom of the scale we have the dead earth and water. Next come the various members of the vegetable kingdom. These, in turn, are organized among themselves, from the humble lichen which clothes the rocks, and is so hard and dry and dead that it seems difficult to tell whether its nature is vegetable or mineral, up through order after order, the algæ of sea and pond, the wild-flowers of glen and field, the

roses and lilies of the garden, the bushes which blush with ripe fruit in summer, and the trees which are ruddy with it in autumn, up to the great monarchs of the forest which we use to build our houses and our ships. Above the vegetable kingdom comes the animal; and it, in its turn, is divided into lower and higher forms, from the orders which lie on the border-land, as to which it needs the keen eye of the naturalist to tell whether they are animals or plants, and the animalculæ, millions of which find room to disport themselves in the glass of water that you raise to your lips on a thirsty summer's day, up through the myriads of creatures, shelled or naked, which people sea and land, marked by the absence of that recognised dividing mark in the animal world, the backbone; up through vertebrated reptile, and fish, and bird, and beast, to man, the monarch of all he surveys. You see how we rise step by step, from lower to higher, from higher to highest. In the human family itself, the same grand law of subordination still holds. There is a regular ascent from the tribes of savage lands, with their low intelligence, and unrestrained passions, and uncivilised life, up to the proud product of our Western culture. Does the reign of this law stop here? On earth it does, for on earth man is the highest inhabitant. "Thou hast put all things under his feet!" But we pass from earth to the inhabited world beyond, which we are now engaged in exploring, and onward still goes the

grand march of the progress of this mighty law. Next above man stand the Angels, a little lower than whom he was made. They themselves are organized into orders, from the lowest, the ordinary messengers of heaven, through "the thrones, and dominions, and principalities, and powers" which mark out their various ranks, to the Archangels at their head. From the Archangels still onward and upward we sweep, till we reach the Seraphim and Cherubim who stand nearest the throne, and form the last link of the long and splendid chain which binds the great Supreme to all parts of His creation. It is at this topmost link we are now to look.

You ask for a description of the Cherubim. Every one knows the popular idea of what they are, as embodied in the shape given them by the sculptor. With him, a cherub is a childish form with two tiny wings. But, if Scripture is to be taken as an authority on the subject, this is about as different from the correct representation of a cherub as anything could well be. Happily we are able to give an authoritative description of Cherubim in the words of one qualified to give it as no ordinary man could be. Ezekiel saw Cherubim, and, in one of the most glowing passages of the book which bears his name, he tells us what he saw. He was by the river Chebar, and he says: "I looked, and behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself,

and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire : also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance ; they had the likeness of a man, and every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. And their feet were straight feet ; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot ; and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass. And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides ; and they four had their faces and their wings. Their wings were joined one to another ; they turned not when they went ; they went every one straight forward. As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man and the face of a lion on the right side ; and they four had the face of an ox on the left side ; they four also had the face of an eagle. Thus were their faces : and their wings were stretched upward ; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies. And they went every one straight forward : whither the spirit was to go, they went ; and they turned not when they went. As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, and like the appearance of lamps : it went up and down among the living creatures ; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of

lightning. Now, as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces. The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the colour of a beryl: and they four had one likeness: and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel. When they went, they went upon their four sides; and they turned not when they went. As for their rings, they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four. And when the living creatures went, the wheels went by them; and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up. Whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went; thither was their spirit to go; and the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. And the likeness of the firmament upon the heads of the living creatures was as the colour of the terrible crystal, stretched forth over their heads above. And under the firmament were their wings straight, the one toward the other; every one had two, which covered on this side, and every one had two, which covered on that side, their bodies. And when they went, I heard the noise of their

wings, like the noise of great waters, as the voice of the Almighty, the voice of speech, as the noise of an host. When they stood, they let down their wings, and there was a voice from the firmament that was over their heads when they stood, and had let down their wings. And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it. And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it; from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about. As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face" (Ezek. i. 4-28).

Ezekiel had a second glimpse of the Cherubim on another occasion, and again, happily, he tells us what he saw. He says: "There appeared in the Cherubim the form of a man's hand under their wings. And when I looked, behold the four wheels by the Cherubim, one wheel by one cherub, and another wheel by another cherub: and the appearance of the wheels was as the colour of a beryl stone. And as for their appearances, they four had

one likeness, as if a wheel had been in the midst of a wheel. When they went, they went upon their four sides; they turned not as they went, but to the place whither the head looked they followed it; they turned not as they went. And their whole body, and their backs, and their hands, and their wings, and the wheels, were full of eyes round about, even the wheels that they four had. As for the wheels, it was cried unto them in my hearing, O wheel! And every one had four faces. The first face was the face of a cherub, and the second face was the face of a man, and the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle. . . . And when the Cherubim went, the wheels went by them; and when the Cherubim lifted up their wings to mount up from the earth, the same wheels also turned not from beside them. When they stood, these stood; and when they were lifted up, these lifted up themselves also; for the spirit of the living creatures was in them. Then the glory of the Lord departed from off the threshold of the house, and stood over the Cherubim. And the Cherubim lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight. When they went out, the wheels also were beside them; and every one stood at the door of the east gate of the Lord's house; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above. This is the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel by the river of Chebar; and I knew that they were the Cherubim. Every

one had four faces apiece, and every one four wings ; and the likeness of the hands of a man was under their wings. And the likeness of their faces was the same faces which I saw by the river of Chebar, their appearances and themselves : they went every one straight forward " (Ezek. x. 8-22).

Stop now for a moment and try to think what this weird vision actually conveys to us. The task is difficult, but let us at least attempt it. As you stand beside the prophet and look, you see four marvellously strange creatures, different from anything you ever saw or imagined or dreamed—creatures with a certain human aspect, but this conjoined with features of some of the lower animals. Each has four faces and four wings, and from beneath each wing you see a human hand protruding. All about the creatures is a strange glow and glitter, only comparable to the sheen of highly burnished brass flashing in the sunlight ; so that, as the wondrous beings flit before your eyes, it is as if incessant lightnings flashed, quick and lurid, through the air. But more mystic still, Ezekiel saw a strange network of wheels, greenish coloured like beryl ; great lofty wheels circling incessantly round and round within others still greater and loftier, and all revolving with a speed dazzling the eye and making the brain swim, as they rolled back and forth through the air, never staying, yet never turning. More startling still, all over the Cherubim and the wheels were great

eyes of a piercing keenness, eyes like none that Ezekiel had ever seen, countless in number, and looking him through and through in a manner he had never known. As these unearthly creatures passed and repassed through the air, the whir of their wings made a deep, awesome noise like the steady earth-shaking tramp of a huge body of armed men, or the measured boom of mighty seas breaking, on some night of storm, against the cliffs of an iron-bound coast. No wonder that, as the prophet stood, he was spellbound. No wonder, as he saw this marvellous, unearthly procession flash past, and heard, as it passed, the strange noises which accompanied it, that he fell on his face like a dead man. Stranger, weirder sight mortal eyes surely never looked upon.

Now, to understand anything about the Cherubim of whom Ezekiel gives this description, we must look for a moment at their biblical history. Where do they first make their appearance on the sacred canvas? Almost with the very beginning of the Bible. And they are ushered upon the scene abruptly, without a word of preparation, or introduction, or description, as if, though spoken of for the first time, they were so well known as to need neither introduction nor comment. In Gen. iii. 24 we read—"So He drove out the man: and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubim and a flaming sword, which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." The Revised Version makes one small change in this statement;

small, but significant. It reads the passage—"He placed at the east of the garden of Eden *the* Cherubim." The article not only points to the Cherubim as a definitely understood class of beings, but gives us to understand that the whole of the Cherubim, and not some of them, as might be inferred from the reading of our Authorized Version, were placed in this position at the east of Eden. So much for this reference to them. The next scriptural mention of them is in Ex. xxv. 18. Here, among the directions given by God to Moses with regard to the construction of the Tabernacle, we find this: "Thou shalt make two Cherubim of gold; of beaten work shalt thou make them, in the two ends of the mercy-seat. And make one Cherub on the one end and the other Cherub on the other end; even of the mercy-seat shall ye make the Cherubim on the two ends thereof. And the Cherubim shall stretch forth their wings on high, covering the mercy-seat with their wings, and their faces shall look one to another; toward the mercy-seat shall the faces of the Cherubim be." Here, again, it is to be noticed that not a word is said as to what the Cherubim were to be like. The pattern of everything else in and about the Tabernacle is described with all the minuteness of a builder's specification. But nothing whatever is said of the form of the Cherubim. Only directions are given as to the position and aspect of their faces and wings. Moses is simply told to make

them. Does not this point to the idea that he was familiar with their appearance? God would have told him their form if it had been necessary.

Connected with this passage is the cognate one referring to the placing of the Cherubim in the Temple. It is in 1 Kings vi. 23. We are there told of Solomon, that "within the oracle he made two Cherubim of olive tree, each ten cubits high, and five cubits was the one wing of the Cherub, and five cubits the other wing of the Cherub; from the uttermost part of one wing unto the uttermost part of the other were ten cubits," etc. Notice here the difference between these Cherubim of Solomon and those of Moses. The purpose of both was the same. Their position was the same, and their shape, so far as we can gather it, was the same. But Solomon's Cherubim were made of olive wood overlaid with gold, whereas those of Moses were of solid gold. The question arises—were these Solomonic Cherubim substitutes for those of Moses, or were they additions to them? If they were substitutes, then the further question arises—what became of the original two? If they were additions, then, contrary to the general opinion, were there four Cherubim, altogether, above the ark? Who can answer these questions?

All we can do is to form to ourselves a dim mental picture of strange winged figures standing in the impenetrable darkness of the Holy of Holies—their outstretched golden pinions at once forming,

as it were, a throne for the cloud of the Shekinah glory, and a canopy for the mercy-seat, and their wistful, earnest faces gazing continually and solemnly downwards, as if in rapt, ecstatic, worshipful contemplation of the mysteries that slumbered beneath them. There the High Priest left them when the annual day of atonement was over; and there, when a year had sped, he found them again when he entered God's shrine.

Did it ever strike you as singular, that the same God whom we find in the twentieth chapter of Exodus laying down so solemnly and positively as the second commandment of His Decalogue the injunction—"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above or in the earth beneath," only five chapters further on is Himself found commanding the making of these graven images? Certainly it appears, at the first blush of the matter, strange that He should. Yet such is the fact, explain it as we may. What are we to say of it? Josephus blames Solomon for making the brazen sea in the Temple, with its oxen supporting it, on the ground that in placing these figures of animals there he was violating the second Commandment. But here we have Bezaleel and Aholiab, by express and direct command of God, making the Cherubim and placing them in the Tabernacle.

The explanation surely is, that the second Commandment is to be taken as a whole, like any other

of the ten. We are not to read its opening clauses, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth," and then stop. The Commandment does not convey its meaning unless we take in what follows, and connect with the beginning the ending words, "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them." Its object is not to repress the legitimate exercise of the sculptor's or painter's art, but to forbid the application of that art to the promotion of an idolatrous worship. We ourselves always practically take the Commandment with limitations. Rather, to speak more correctly, we take it as a whole. We decorate the walls of our rooms with many a "likeness" of things in heaven and things on earth. We fill our albums with similar "likenesses," and we find no fault with the sculptor for carving his statues in marble or casting them in bronze. We have no feeling that in doing any of these things we are violating the second or any other Commandment, seeing we do not "bow down to them nor serve them." Yes, you say, but we do not place these pictures or statues in the house of God, and the mystery is that here we have the Most High ordering them to be placed there. But will any one say precisely how far this distinction between God's house and our own is to be legitimately pressed? Your drawing-room is the house of God when you gather in it round God's feet at the family altar,—as truly

the house of God as ever was the stateliest cathedral "with long-drawn aisle and fretted vault." Yet, on the walls of your drawing-room are these "likenesses," and all about it are these "images." The Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Divines catches here, evidently, the meaning and the spirit of the second Commandment: "The second Commandment forbiddeth the worshipping of God by images," — not the making of images,—"or any other way not appointed in His Word." It was to guard His worship that God spake that Commandment; and, for the same reason, when He placed the Cherubim in His house, to show that they were not placed there as objects of worship, He directed them to be placed where the people and ordinary priests never saw them, and caused them to be represented in an attitude of constant worship, their heads bent reverently down, and their faces averted from His symbolic presence and fixed on the lid which covered the ark. There is no contradiction here, or anywhere, between God's Word and His actions. In this instance we can plainly see this for ourselves; and if, at any time, in any other case, we cannot see it, we may be very sure that the God of truth never yet contradicted Himself, and never will.

There is only one other passage in the Bible in which the Cherubim are plainly brought before us. It is Rev. iv. 6. John there tells us that "before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round

about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him: and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come!" One word in this description the Revised Version has very properly altered. Instead of "beasts" it reads "living creatures," the true translation. Now these creatures are not here expressly called Cherubim. But the account given of them leaves no manner of doubt that it is the Cherubim that are spoken of. Their number is the same, and their form; and here, as in Ezekiel, we have prominence given to that strange characteristic, the number of their eyes. They figure subsequently in the Book of Revelation, in the unfolding of the great apocalyptic drama. But there is no further description of them. This is the last that is given us in the entire Bible.

We have now taken a rapid glance at the Scripture references to the Cherubim. What have we gained by it? In general this—that we now understand that there are in heaven four great creatures, higher than all the rest that are there, endowed with greater power and loftier faculties, who stand nearest to the throne of the Eternal. Do not suppose that in reality their form is like

that pictured by Ezekiel or John. Do not, in picturing them to yourselves, imagine heads of lion, or eagle, or ox, or man. Do not think that, when you are admitted into heaven, you will see those terrible wheels incessantly revolving, or those strange eyes glancing out from beneath incessantly flying wings. In reading these descriptions we are to recollect that we are reading symbolical accounts. You do not expect to find in heaven streets literally paved with gold, or to see seas of literal glass, or gates of real pearl, such as are spoken of in the Book of Revelation. So with the Cherubim. The things of heaven are unspeakable. They cannot be put into human language. All that can be done to describe them to us is to give us emblems, which, put together and rightly understood, furnish us with some conception of them—the best conception that can be conveyed to human minds. What is meant by the inspired descriptions of the Cherubim is evidently this—they have the strength and majesty of the lion, the keen vision and swift flight of the eagle, the patient obedience and sturdy steadfastness of the ox, all conjoined to the keenness of the human intellect. These ideas are intensified by the multitudes of eyes and hands and wheels, the whole description, when pieced together, giving the idea of beings perfectly framed, so as to be worthy to be placed nearest God, at once ready to do His highest errands, and worthy, above all others, to stand, as His lords-in-waiting, next His throne.

There has been endless discussion about the nature and functions of the Cherubim. Many opinions on the subject we may at once dismiss as baseless. Some have said that they represent the four cardinal virtues (wisdom, justice, temperance, and fortitude); others, that they are symbols of the four elements (earth, air, fire, and water); others, that they represent the four great monarchies of ancient times, or the four chief passions (joy, hope, grief, and fear). Still more strangely, some have held that they are symbols of the four evangelists, or the four major prophets, or the four chief ages of the world, or the four archangels! Others say that they represent God's fourfold covenant with man in Christ, Christ being the man represented by the human face, His sacrifice being typified in the ox, His resurrection in the lion, and His ascension in the eagle! That mischievous tendency to spiritualize everything, which has wrought such unspeakable damage to biblical exposition, has, in fact, run riot over the Cherubim. The fancies it has indulged about them are endless. Those that we have specified are only worth mentioning as illustrations of the follies to which men descend, when, leaving the sure ground of God's Word, they allow themselves to speculate unchecked. There is not a shred of foundation for any one of the interpretations now alluded to. They are simply fantasies, and nothing more.

Equally untenable are other ideas of the Cherubim, which have obtained favour with certain sober-minded

expositors of Scripture. They have, for instance, been declared to be symbols of God or of the attributes of God. But the language of the Bible is surely sufficient to disprove this theory. God is said there to dwell "between the Cherubim." Ezekiel tells us that they are "under the God of Israel" (x. 20). In the Book of Revelation we find them worshipping God. Can God worship God, or dwell under or between God? But there is one special disproof of the idea that the Cherubim are symbols of the Divine Being. The Jews were expressly forbidden to make any image of God. We need not enter into the reasons of this prohibition. The fact is undeniable, and it renders the idea that the Cherubim are representations of Him quite untenable. Whatever they are, this much is clear, that they are created beings, perfectly distinct from the Deity.

Yet they are not ordinary Angels. A marked and clear distinction is always drawn between them and Angels. In Revelation (vii. 11) we read that all the Angels "stood round about the throne and about the four living creatures," whom we have seen to be the Cherubim—the Cherubim forming a separate and inner circle, and the Angels an outer circle of different beings. The Cherubim, indeed, are always represented as occupying this position, a different position from Angels, one that we never find the latter assuming. They are always next the throne of God. Then we read of only four

Cherubim; but the Angels are "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands." No doubt, the Cherubim to some extent partake of the angelic nature. They are certainly created beings, as are the Angels. They are servants of God like the Angels. But, if we rightly divide the Word of Truth, we must see that there is a marked and deep distinction drawn between the two orders of beings, which we will only land ourselves in confusion and contradiction if we disregard.

Quite as certain is it that the Cherubim are not symbols of the redeemed. The idea that they are is founded on one solitary passage of Scripture (Rev. v. 9), where it is said—"They sing a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the Book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." This seems, indeed, a very plain indication that the Cherubim are representatives of saved souls. Yet it is most difficult to imagine how they can be so. They existed long before man was redeemed. They stood on the east of Eden at a time when they could not possibly belong to, or represent, a body not then in existence. What are we to say about the matter? The Revised Version comes to our help here again, as it so often does. We open the passage there, and we read this very different statement from that found in the Authorized Version—"For Thou wast slain, and didst purchase

unto God with Thy blood men of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." The "us," it will be seen, is gone from the verse. Long before the inception of the work of the revisers, it had been seen that that word should not be there. The Greek term of which it is the translation is not found in the most ancient manuscripts. It must therefore disappear from the passage, and with it disappears also the only argument for believing that the Cherubim are representatives of redeemed souls.

If we take the plain statements of the Bible in their plain meaning, I think we need not be in much doubt as to who and what the Cherubim are. They are simply Ministers of the Presence. To fit them for this exalted office they are the highest developments of creaturehood. In the opinion of the ancients, the lion was the king of beasts, the eagle the king of birds, the ox of cattle, and man the lord of all. So, when the Almighty would give us such an idea of His chief ministers and nearest attendants, as should best represent to us what they are, He combines, not in reality but in symbolic vision, the courage of the lion, the strength of the ox, the swiftness and keen vision of the eagle, with the intelligence of man. These qualities are intensified by the many eyes, and hands, and wheels which are conjoined in the picture, so as to impress upon us with the utmost clearness and vividness the idea that the great Supreme has about Him beings as willing as they are able to speed on His highest

and most difficult errands, whether of mercy or of vengeance, while they are also worthy in the highest degree, so far as created beings can be worthy, to stand next His throne.

In the sixth chapter of Isaiah there is a striking description of a scene which, as we shall see immediately, has much to do with the subject we are considering. The passage is as follows: "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. Above it stood the Seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke" (Isa. vi. 1-4). This passage is remarkable as the only one in the Bible in which the Seraphim are mentioned by name. But the explanation of this circumstance, that we have but this one reference to them in Scripture, seems to me to be plain. It is, that the Seraphim are simply the Cherubim called by another name. Why do I say so? First, their name suggests the thought. The word Seraphim means "burning ones," and we have seen how fire in various forms, such as burning coals, lamps, etc., is associated with the Cherubim. Next, the position which they are represented as occupying is the

same as that assigned in Scripture to the Cherubim. The office of the Cherubim is to be the personal attendants of the Deity; and we have only to glance at the scene described by Isaiah to see that that is the office also discharged by the Seraphim. That reverential cry also—"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts!"—reminds us vividly of the worship of the Cherubim as described in the Book of Revelation. True, Isaiah says that the Seraphim had each six wings, whereas Ezekiel's Cherubim had but four. No one, however, who is familiar with biblical symbolism will lay any stress on that difference. The Cherubim in the Tabernacle and the Temple had only two wings each, and those mentioned in the Book of Revelation had six, the same number as the Seraphim here. We are to remember that these things were seen in visions, and that, as has been already explained, these wings, and eyes, and wheels are emblems of certain qualities and attributes, not realities themselves. The visions may differ in certain particulars and yet be visions of the same beings, just as two painters may paint ideal portraits of the same person, both correct, yet quite different from each other. Therefore we need attach no importance to such differences in the accounts of these beings. It seems plain that, putting together what we are told of the Cherubim and the Seraphim, comparing the visions of Ezekiel and John with those of Isaiah, we can come to no other conclusion but that these are two different names for the same beings.

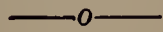
There is another curious point to be noticed, which we may possibly connect also with these strange intelligences. In the Old Testament we read of the Teraphim. The word occurs half a dozen times in our Authorized Version,¹ but oftener in the original. The images which Rachel stole (Gen. xxxi. 19) were Teraphim, and the image which Michal laid in the bed to deceive Saul's messengers is rendered "the Teraphim" in the Revised Version. These Teraphim were images, which in those early ages were regarded with superstitious veneration—why, it is difficult exactly to say. Now, the word Teraphim differs from the word Seraphim by but a single letter. As a matter of fact, it is simply the Aramaic form of the same word. If this be so, and if the Seraphim are simply the Cherubim under another name, then would it not appear that these Teraphim, which were so frequently found in Jewish houses, were neither more nor less than portable models of the Cherubim? We have already noted as a strange thing that Moses was told by God to make Cherubim for the Tabernacle, but not told of what shape to make them. We argued that the reason why no description of them was given must have been that their form was so familiar and generally known as to need no description. Now, if, as some say, the Cherubim which were placed at the east of the garden of Eden remained there till the Flood—if,

¹ Judg. xvii. 5, xviii. 14, xviii. 17, xviii. 18, xviii. 20; Hos. iii. 4.

as there appears to be some reason for believing, the men of those early days worshipped before them as the ordinary place of their religious service and the place of the revealed presence of Jehovah, then we can easily understand why and how they acquired this familiarity which is thus taken for granted in the sacred narrative, and we can also easily understand how rude images of these mysterious beings should, in a primitive age, when there was neither Bible nor Temple to guide men's religious beliefs, become a kind of charms or household gods. Such a supposition, at all events, makes much clear in the earlier books of Scripture which we will otherwise have great difficulty in comprehending.

What an impression of the majesty of God is given us by the splendour and magnificence of the Cherubim! History tells us of a great French preacher who, officiating before Louis XIV., produced a never-to-be-forgotten impression by the utterance of the one sentence—"God alone is great!" Look at the Cherubim! Consider that, mighty and wonderful beings as they are, they are but servants of God, and may you not gain some conception of what a great God He must be! If the servants are so mighty and magnificent, what is the King Himself! Yes, surely God alone is great!

CHAPTER V.



The Angels.

CHAPTER V.

THE ANGELS.

NEXT in order, a topic as full of interest as of comfort falls to be considered—the heavenly Angels. We are to endeavour to learn what Holy Writ teaches us about them.

Speaking in general, we find that there is a body of spiritual beings in heaven, and on earth, and constantly flitting between, called Angels. The name is significant, and itself tells us much about them. They are Angels—messengers. Their business is to fly continually on the errands of God. They are spirits, but created spirits. When they were created, we cannot tell. But we know that it was at all events before the creation of the world, for we read that they were then already in existence. When Creation took place, “the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job xxxviii. 7)—the Angels being clearly meant. But, though they had a beginning, they will have no end. “Neither can they die any more,” says our Lord of the people of the resurrection, “but are

equal unto the Angels" (Luke xx. 36), who, therefore, are never to die.

Now, when we say that the Angels are spirits, what is meant is clear. I do not know, however, that this term necessarily implies that they are incorporeal. It is true that "a spirit hath not flesh and bones." But there may be other kinds of bodies besides those of flesh and bones. Indeed, Paul tells us plainly that there are "celestial bodies" as well as "bodies terrestrial," and he draws a marked distinction between two other kinds of bodies—the natural body and the spiritual body. This earth once saw both the natural body and the spiritual body in the person of the same Being. For over thirty-three years our blessed Lord wore an ordinary human body, a body that hungered, and thirsted, and was weary, and suffered, and at last died. But when He rose from the grave, though He rose with the same body, it was the same body wondrously changed; and the body, to the possession of which we look forward, is one that shall be made "like unto His own glorious body." For "there is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." It is clear, therefore, that there are several kinds of bodies. The Council of Nice held that Angels have bodies, not composed, however, of flesh like ours, but of ether or light. The Angel who rolled away the stone from the sepulchre is described in such a way as at least to suggest that he had a body of some kind. "His countenance was like lightning, and

his raiment white as snow" (Matt. xxviii. 3). It would be going beyond the evidence to assert positively that Angels have bodies. But it ought to be said that the fact of their being spiritual beings does not necessarily prevent their having them. It is certain that every time they have appeared on earth they seem to have appeared with plainly visible bodies, and no intimation is given to the reader that this is not their usual condition. Moreover, those bodies, in all cases which are described to us, seem to have been of the form of human bodies. The Angels which appeared to Abraham are called "these men," and those which came to Lot in Sodom are called "men." We read of "the man Gabriel" in Daniel. In Joseph's garden "two men appeared in shining garments;" and at the Ascension there were "two men in white apparel." There is certainly nothing in the Bible to indicate that Angels have not bodies, but much which possibly tends the other way.

However this may be, their appearance is always represented in Scripture as very glorious. Brightness and splendour, we are given to understand, are their constant attributes. They seem also to be gifted with perpetual youth. In Christ's sepulchre there was "a young man sitting." With us, as age advances, it ploughs its furrows in the face, the gait becomes feeble, and the mind less able for its work. It is never so with the Angels. They grow older, but "time writes no wrinkle on their azure brow."

Always, also, in the Bible they are represented as

"clothed in white." The saints in the Book of Revelation are clad in white robes. So are the Angels. White would seem to be the heavenly colour. At the Transfiguration, Christ's garments became "white and glistening," "so as no fuller on earth can white them;" and the Angels and all the other inhabitants of heaven are uniformly represented as attired in the same hue.

The sex of the Angels is also noticeable. We never read of female Angels in Scripture. They are always styled men, young men, and the names given to them are masculine names—Gabriel, Michael, and so on. Painters and sculptors may represent female Angels, but it is certain that we read of none in Scripture.

Again, most people imagine Angels as having wings. Indeed, wings seem inseparable from the conventional idea of an Angel. Will you be surprised to be told that there is no trace in Scripture of anything of the kind? You will perhaps tell me of Daniel's statement about "the man Gabriel being caused to fly very swiftly" (Dan. ix. 21); but the word in the original gives no indication of such a mode of flight as we understand when we speak of wings. It simply means to travel very speedily, without reference to the mode by which the speed is attained. Some one else may recall the passage in the Book of Revelation about the "angel flying in the midst of heaven." But the same remark applies to this place. There is no mention of wings; and

even if they were mentioned in such a book as the Apocalypse, do you think that we should therefore necessarily conclude that wings were literally possessed? When we read of "a woman clothed with the sun," do we take the description as literal? The fact is, as we said when speaking of the Cherubim, art and Scripture are not unfrequently completely at variance, even when the former is dealing with the latter. Art seems to take its conceptions from the poets and not from the Bible. You may cherish, if you like, the old superstition of angelic pinions; but do not, if you please, base it on Scripture. To me it is far pleasanter to think of them as having a form liker my own; but, whether that be so or not, if you wish to keep your ideas in line with the Bible, you must search deeper than I have done before you give wings to the Angels.

It is more important, however, to think of the attributes of the Angels, and there is no doubt and no difficulty as to them. We speak here, it is of course to be remembered, only of the heavenly Angels. They are holy, unspeakably holy. No impure thought ever crosses their minds. No sin finds harbourage in their breasts. No evil act ever stains their hands. But, all the while, they are fallible. Theirs is not the holiness of God, which cannot change. Some of them once lost their goodness, and fell from their first estate, as man fell from his. Is it not wonderful to think that Satan was once a holy Angel? It strikes one with awe to

know that there was a time when all those unutterably wicked beings whose abode is now in hell, whose delight is in wickedness, who gloat over the ruin of souls, stood amid the shining throng of heaven, and hymned the praise of the Creator in strains as loud as any of the rest. Yet such is the fact. We cannot tell when that terrible scene occurred, which we know did once occur, when there was a Fall in heaven, as afterwards there was a Fall on earth. It was before the Fall of man, we know, for it was one of the Angels who had fallen that tempted man to his Fall. The point for us tremblingly to ponder is, that all created beings, from highest to lowest, are fallible. There is One infallible in all the universe, only One.

The Angels have, of course, none of the essential attributes of the Divine Being. They are not infinite. They are not eternal, for though they never die, they had a beginning. That they are not unchangeable, the fall of Satan and the others is enough to prove. They are not omniscient, nor omnipresent, nor omnipotent. They cannot create. They cannot alter the laws of God. They are very lofty beings, but we must draw a marked distinction between them and the Loftiest. We have been made a little lower than they, but they are a great deal lower than God. The minutest insect that flits in the sun of a summer's day is nearer to us than they are to God. They are not to be worshipped. This is clear from Scripture. When Manoah would have

bowed before one of them, he was told—"If thou wilt offer a burnt-offering, thou must offer it unto the Lord" (Judg. xiii. 16). John, too, would twice have worshipped an Angel. But his homage would not be received. "See thou do it not," he was told; "I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God" (Rev. xix. 10). "Let no man," says Paul, "beguile you in a voluntary humility and worshipping of Angels" (Col. ii. 18). Oh, no! when we would worship, we must press through and beyond Angels and Saints and Cherubim, never staying till we come to the Throne itself. They all worship Him that sits there, and Him only. "To Thee Cherubim and Seraphim continually do cry. To Thee all Angels cry aloud;" and joining with them in worship, we cry to them—"Bless ye the Lord, ye His Angels, that excel in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word." We dare no more indulge in angelolatry than in idolatry. The worship and the glory are due to God alone.

There are gradations of rank among the Angels. At their head are Archangels, and shading away from them are lower and lower orders. Some suppose that there is but one Archangel, and that he is Christ. And certainly we never read distinctly of Archangels. In Scripture the word is always in the singular number,—the Archangel. It is solely a New Testament word, and there it only occurs twice, once in that sublime passage which has cheered so many

hearts by the grave-side, "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God" (1 Thess. iv. 16); and again in the Epistle of Jude, in that mysterious statement which tells us of Michael the Archangel contending with the devil about the body of Moses (Jude 9). Although, however, the word Archangel is not found in the Old Testament, we meet this same Michael in the Book of Daniel. There appears to be no good reason for identifying him with our blessed Lord. There is not even a hint to that effect in the Bible, and the language of the passage in the First Epistle to the Thessalonians seems to imply the contrary. No! We are lower than the Angels, but Christ is higher even than the Archangels; and I cannot doubt that to both Angels and Archangels the command equally applies—"Let all the Angels of God worship Him!"

The holy Angels are very numerous.

"Millions of spiritual creatures walk this earth unseen,
Both when we sleep and when we wake."

We read in Scripture of "an innumerable company of Angels." They are so numerous that words fail the sacred writers when they would describe their number. There are "thousands of thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand" of them. I do not doubt that the air all round us teems with Angels. They are, also, not only very numerous, but immensely strong. They "excel in strength." Then we know that their life is serenely and con-

stantly happy. They "do always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven." And their conformity to God's will is complete. Morning and night, and every other time we say the prayer which our Lord has taught us, we are reminded of this by the words, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." To them their duty to God is their pleasure, and their pleasure their duty. Our fallen nature is "enmity against God," and often, when we obey Him, it is grudgingly. We regard God as a hard master. We count Him "an austere man," reaping where He did not sow, and gathering where He had not strewed. But it is not so above. Conformity to God's will is the Angels' delight. No heavenly Angel is ever represented by either of the two sons in Christ's parable. They neither say they go on God's business, and go not; nor do they refuse to go, and afterwards repent. In that perfect obedience, that complete harmony, that entire oneness between their will and God's, we see a picture alike of what we aim at on earth and what we hope for in heaven.

What do the Angels do? One might almost reply — What do they not do? They are the servants of God, waiting to do His bidding, and, consequently, wherever you find God acting, there you may be sure the Angels are at work. Look over the Bible, and you find them everywhere and continually busy. Begin at the beginning—they were at Creation. Go to the end of the world, and

you hear the Archangel's trump. As at these first and last scenes, so is it all the way between. We have Angels appearing to Abraham, to Hagar, to Jacob, to Lot, to Balaam, to Manoah, to Gideon, to Elijah, to David. The Law at Sinai was given "by dispositions of Angels;" the birth of Christ was announced by them; His sufferings were alleviated by their ministrations; the stone was rolled away from His tomb by one of them; His ascension announced by others. You cannot read the Bible without being struck with the large part which they play in it, and without being convinced that the affairs of the Church and the world have been and are still largely administered by them, of course under the supreme direction of God. They do not now appear visibly to us, as they sometimes did in the olden days. But their ministrations are none the less real on that account.

One special duty which they evidently discharge is the taking care of God's people. Over and over again we are assured of this in Holy Scripture. "The Angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them" (Ps. xxxiv. 7). It is a blessed thought that, whether we wake or sleep, they are continually keeping watch and ward over us. "He shall give His Angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone" (Ps. xci. 11). "In all thy ways"—the way of sorrow or the way of

joy, the rough way or the pleasant way—they attend thee, O Christian! “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” (Heb. i. 14). This is their special duty. They ministered to Christ, and they minister to Christ’s people. Examples of this ministration are thickly strewn over the Bible. They ministered to Abraham, to Elijah, to Elisha, to Daniel, to Joseph of Nazareth, to Zacharias, to the Virgin Mary, to Cornelius, to Peter, to Philip, to Paul. One has only to read the biographies of these ancient worthies to have illustrated to him the large part which they play in human affairs. Edmund Spenser might well write,—

“Oh, the exceeding grace
Of highest God, that loves His creatures so,
And all His works with mercy doth embrace,
That blessed Angels He sends to and fro
To serve us wicked men, to serve His wicked foe!
How oft do they their silver bowers leave
To come to succour us that succour want!
How oft do they with golden pinions cleave
The flitting skies, like flying pursuivant,
Against foul fiends to aid us militant!
They for us fight, they watch and duly ward,
And their bright squadrons round about us plant;
And all for love and nothing for reward:
Oh, why should heavenly God to man have such
regard?”

Some maintain that each individual believer has his own guardian Angel. They base this view on such a passage as—“Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones: for I say unto you, That in heaven their Angels do always behold the face of

my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. xviii. 10). Some quote also in favour of this doctrine the story of Rhoda, who, when Peter came knocking to the door of her mistress, was told by those in the house, "It is his Angel" (Acts xii. 15). This latter passage, however, cannot be taken as lending much authority to the view. The prevailing opinion in Peter's day may have been that every one has a guardian Angel; but that prevailing opinion carries no more weight with it than any popular idea now-a-days on this or any other subject. We need a firmer foundation on which to base our belief than prevailing opinions. Besides, it is open to question whether the expression, "It is his Angel," does not mean Peter's ghost, the idea in Mary's house at the time being that he was dead. The passage in Matthew is stronger and more pertinent, and certainly teaches, not only that children, but all God's little ones, the babes of the spiritual kingdom, enjoy the care of guardian Angels. Many a time people have wondered how children escape the many perils of childhood. Ignorant of danger, they rush heedlessly into it. They know no fear. They take no precaution. Yet they escape. As with children, so with babes of an older growth. May not the reason be that angelic hands support and guide them?

This doctrine of angelic tutelage is indeed most comfortable in all views of it. It has been too much neglected. In our reaction from the angelolatry of Romanism we have rushed into the

opposite extreme, and have too often ignored altogether the existence and the care of our heavenly guardians. Yet surely it is a truth on which we may well stay ourselves.

It has been held by some that particular Angels have been given the charge of particular countries. In the Book of Daniel we read of Michael, "the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people;" and similarly we are told of the princes of Persia and Greece. Dr. Charles Hodge declares that there is nothing in this doctrine out of analogy with the clear teaching of Scripture. Nor is there. And certainly it is a great thought that each nation should have its special angelic sentinel. It is at least a pleasing idea that Britain may have, in fact and not in fancy or poetic language, her guardian Angel, watching over her destinies, and restraining and conquering her enemies. How much better such guardianship than all the forts which she could build along her coasts, or all the ironclads that she could muster in the Channel! Men have sometimes wondered at the strange opportuneness of the wind three hundred years ago which scattered and destroyed the so-called invincible Armada, by which Philip of Spain expected to reduce us to the sway of Rome. What if we are to see in that fierce tempest the work of the Angel to whom our guardianship has been committed, and who "rideth upon the wings of the wind"? We have wondered, again, at that other wind, which a hundred years

later rose so timeously to waft to our shores from Holland the ships which bore William of Orange to our deliverance. What if it be another example of the same ?

It is not among the outer elements only, however, that the Angels operate. They act on our minds. It is a most interesting and moving thought that they come within us—into our souls ; that they speak to us ; that they influence us for good ; that they suggest to us what we should do, and what we should not do. Alas ! there is a dark side to this comfortable truth. If the holy Angels are ever inciting our minds towards good, the evil emissaries of the Evil One are as persistently and incessantly enticing us to evil.

“Man hath two attendant Angels
Ever with him as he strays.”

You have sometimes been puzzled how to account for good impulses which have occurred to you, perhaps with startling suddenness, and, as far as you could see, without effort on your part. What if they are the work of your attendant Angel, as truly as the wicked suggestions which you have loathed, and against which you have struggled, are the doing of the evil emissaries of the Wicked One ?

Angels seem to be specially present in the House of Prayer. We know that they take a deep interest in the gospel and in its progress. “There is joy among the Angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” They “desire to look into” the things

of the kingdom of God, and we are specially told that when we meet for worship they are present. In that beautiful chapter of Ecclesiastes, for example, which begins, "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools," we are thus admonished: "Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the Angel that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?" (Eccles. v. 6). It would seem from these words as if Angels noted all our conduct and words in the house of prayer. In the First Epistle to the Corinthians, again, where we have so many minute directions about worship, we are told that women should always pray with covered head; and one reason for this regulation is given us—"For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the Angels" (1 Cor. xi. 10). The Revised Version reads this curious text thus: "For this cause ought the woman to have a sign of authority on her head, because of the Angels." Dr. Hodge explains the passage in the following way: "The apostle had asserted and proved that the woman is subordinate to the man, and he had assumed as granted that the veil was the conventional symbol of the man's authority. The inference is that the woman ought to wear the ordinary symbol of the power of her husband. As it was proper in itself, and demanded by the common sense of propriety, that the woman

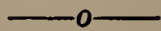
should be veiled, it was specially proper in the worshipping assemblies, for there they were in the presence, not merely of men, but of Angels. It was therefore not only out of deference to public sentiment, but from reverence to those higher intelligences, that the woman should conform to all the rules of decorum" (*Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, in loco*). What a sight we should see if our eyes were suddenly opened some Sabbath day to behold the angelic visitants in the place where we bow in worship before God! All over us, all around us, white-robed angels hovering, listening to the voice of the preacher, noting the acts of the hearers, watching the effects of the message delivered from the pulpit, taking cognizance of the praises and the prayers; and, when the service is done, winging their flight back to heaven to carry the tidings of the worship to the God who has been worshipped! How solemn it should ever make us, how circumspect, how holy in our Christian assemblies, to think that they are held in such an august presence! How the thought should emphasize that advice of the Preacher — "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God"!

There is one epoch of our lives when, we are told, the Angels play a specially important and touching part in our history. At that solemn hour when the soul of the believer leaves the body to go to be with its God, the Angels come to take charge of it. When Lazarus died, the Angels carried him into Abraham's

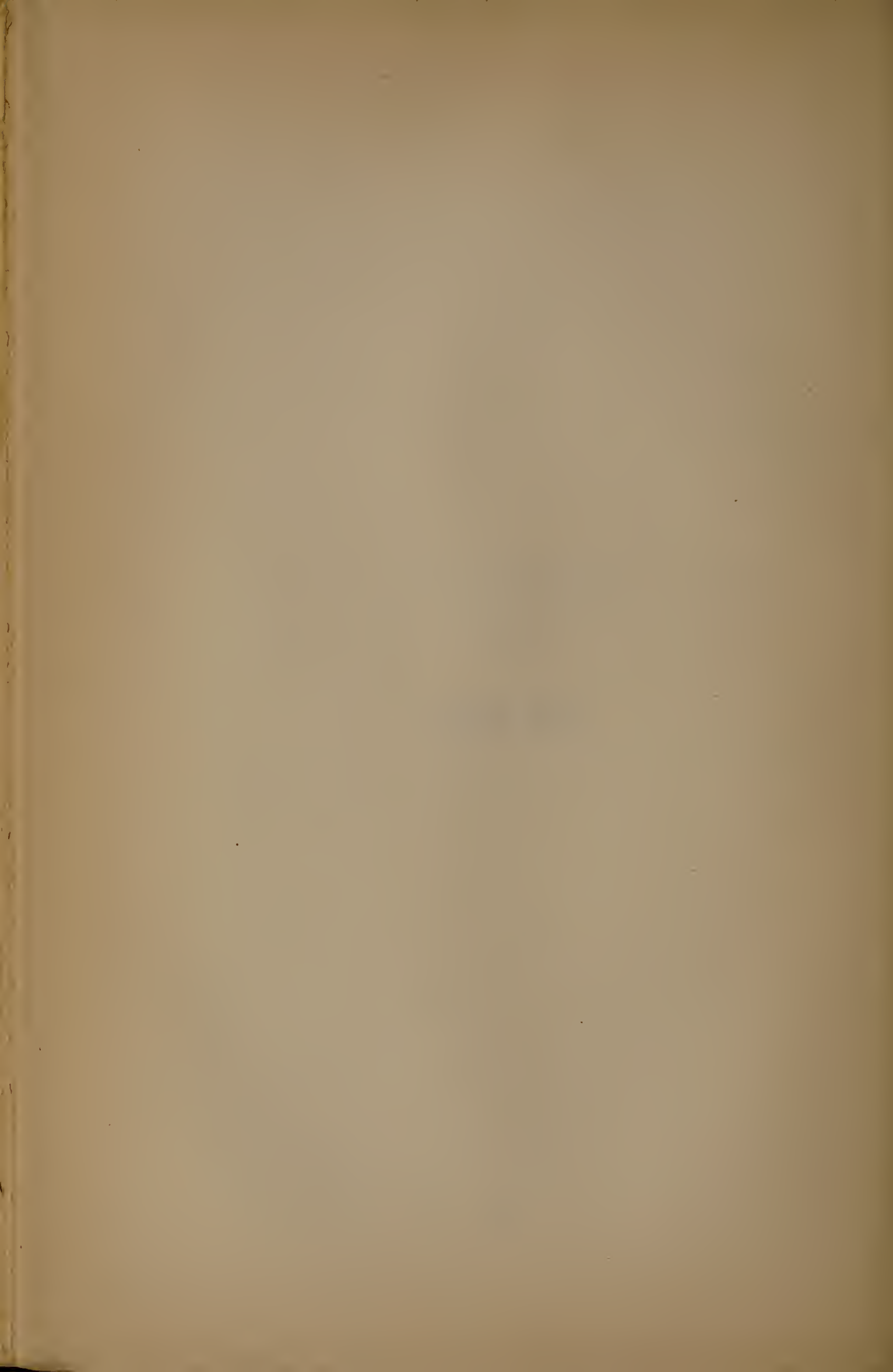
bosom. So is it with every believer. As you stand by the bed on which he lies face to face with the last enemy, you do not see the Angels. But they are there. They are listening to the moans of the sufferer. They are strengthening him to bear his last pains. They are instilling holy thoughts into his mind. They are waiting to carry him home. All is silent in the room. The lights burn low. Every foot moves on tiptoe. There, floating in the air, or standing by the bed, are the celestial messengers,—sometimes the dying eyes seem to see them,—and when the last sigh has been heaved, and, with the last quiver, the soul has fled from the clay tabernacle, they take it in their arms, and in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, have borne it to its God!

From the beginning of life to its end, from the beginning of the world to its end, the Angels are everywhere.

CHAPTER VI.



The Saints.



CHAPTER VI.

THE SAINTS.

WE now come to deal with a class of the inhabitants of heaven who are nearer to us than any of those we have yet considered—our glorified kith and kin. We have spoken of God; but there is such a vast difference and distance between Him and us as keeps us from knowing any save “parts of His ways.” The Cherubim and Angels are, like ourselves, created beings. But they are of a different order from us. We cannot, therefore, have very close sympathy or fellowship with them. They are not bone of our bone or flesh of our flesh. We may admire and wonder at them, and rejoice in their good offices towards us. But that is all. It is different with the Saints in heaven, at whom we are now about to look. They are men and women like ourselves. Some of them are our nearest and dearest, from whom we parted in bitterness in the death-chamber, and whom it is one of our most ardent longings to meet again where parting is unknown. Great and important, therefore, as have

been the topics which have occupied us hitherto, they must yield in interest to that which we are now to consider. "Blood is thicker than water," and the redeemed in glory are our own flesh and blood, whom some of us loved in the past long ago, whom, as our own, we love still, and about whom, therefore, we cannot but desire to know all that can be known.

That the number of human beings in heaven is very great, is plain beyond doubt. When John got a glimpse of them, he tells us he saw "a great multitude which no man could number." If he tried to count them, he soon gave up the task as hopeless. We can easily see for ourselves that the number must be immense. What will it be when all have got to heaven who are to be there? Look back as far as Adam, and think of all God's servants from his day till now. Think of all the children who have died in infancy. From our own day, let your thoughts travel forward to the last day, and the last man who shall be received up into glory. We do not know what time shall elapse from now till then, from us to him, but from the many things spoken of in prophecy which have to be accomplished before the final consummation of all things, we have reason to believe that we are not very near it yet. Consider, then, all the men and women and children who are yet to be saved. Think of the blessed millennial days, when "none shall need to say to his brother, Know the Lord, for all shall

know Him, from the greatest to the least;" and when, therefore, every one without exception shall leave this earth only to go to heaven,—add all these together, from the beginning of the world to the end, and certainly the multitude of those who shall be inhabitants of that blessed land must be seen to be indeed enormous. If any one thinks that heaven is a small place for a select few, he knows little of the Scriptures. It is a glorious thought that its inhabitants will be a great multitude which no man can number.

The composition of that multitude is something wonderful to think of. John's vision is here again our guide. It tells us that there will be in it people "of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues" (Rev. vii. 9). In this world nations dwell apart. Each of them has its own laws, its own sovereign or governing body, its own habits and customs. Heaven will be cosmopolitan. In its streets will mingle Englishman, Irishman, Scot, the Frenchman, the German, the Swede, the Italian, the Russian, and people of other colours from other climes, blacks from Africa and from the cotton fields of America, and red men from the primeval forests and boundless prairies. And all tongues will be represented. The number of languages spoken on this globe is hardly yet known. Our British and Foreign Bible Society has printed the Sacred Volume in some two hundred and eighty, and it is increasing the number every year. Every tongue that is

spoken will have its representatives in the celestial country. What language will be used in heaven? Can any one even guess? Is it a mere earthly thought to speak of language? Who can tell? The old saying tells us that "the tongues of mortals are many; the immortals have but one." What is that one? or shall there be more than one? We have no means of ascertaining, none even for speculating. We only know that there shall mingle in that holy society people who on earth have spoken all the languages that have prevailed since the confusion of tongues at Babel.

Have you ever sat down and with closed eyes tried to picture to yourself the society of heaven? Think of it for a moment. Adam, we believe, is there, and Eve. What will it be to behold in the flesh our first parents, and to hear from their own lips the story of those marvellous days of innocence in Eden—the story of the Temptation—the sad tale of the Fall! Noah is there. What thrilling narratives he will be able to give of the days of the Flood! The venerable form of Abraham will be seen moving about in the throng. Once he saw Christ's day afar off, and was glad. Now he sees Him eye to eye. Moses is there, who once talked face to face with God. The kingly David is there. Once he strung his rude Eastern harp to Zion's songs. Now he strikes a more splendid lyre to higher music. John is there, who once leaned on the Master's breast at the Holy Supper; now, we may be sure he is as near

Him as he can be. And Peter and Paul, and Polycarp and Augustine, and Luther, and Calvin, and Melancthon, and Knox, and Melville, and Henderson, and Ridley, and Latimer, and Cranmer, and Thomas Chalmers, and Henry Cooke, and Charles Hodge—and how many more of the Church's worthies! What a sight! The soul glows to think of it. Yes, and nearer ones still and dearer ones—our own fathers and mothers, our sisters and brothers, our little children, whose eyes we closed so tearfully, whose coffins we lowered so sadly into the narrow house, whose last resting-places we so often visit—what will it be to see them again, to enfold them in our embrace, to feel their warm kisses on our cheek once more, to compare experiences since the time of parting! We can but imagine all this! It is more than imagination. It is sober and gladsome truth. But we can only picture it, and, ravishing as the picture is, it is nothing to what the reality will be.

It has already been noticed that the Bible uniformly represents the dress of heaven as white. This is not only the case in such a symbolical book as Revelation, but everywhere that the subject is mentioned. The angel in the Lord's sepulchre was clothed in "a long white garment" (Mark xvi. 5). John tells of "two angels in white." At the Ascension two angels appeared to the disciples "in white apparel." When sober narratives of fact like the Gospels and Acts give such descriptions of the dress of the holy angels, we need not hesitate to accept as literally true the

account of the dress of the saints given in the Apocalypse. It tells us that "they shall walk in white," that "they shall be clothed in white raiment," that "white robes" are given to every one of them. What a dazzling sight it must be! On earth there is every extreme, and every variety of dress, from the "looped and windowed raggedness" of the street beggar to the gorgeous array of the votary of fashion. In heaven all will be clothed in the same spotless white. Here the garments of men are often soiled with the marks of hard toil. In our churches and on our streets the widow's weeds and other sable garments of mourning which tell of bereavement and grief are frequently seen. But in heaven there will be none of these. Wheresoever the eye roams, it will see there only "the fine white linen, which is the righteousness of the saints."

A more important point to be considered is, how are our departed friends occupied in heaven, and how shall we be occupied when we get there? Some will say, how can we know? What data have we to go upon? The Bible satisfies no curiosity on the subject, and where else can we go for information? No doubt there is much that we should wish to know about the subject, of which we can have no knowledge. Many a one has regretted that Lazarus, when he came back to earth after his four days' sojourn in the other world, either told nothing of his experiences, or, if he did, the record of them has been lost. One cannot doubt that his sisters asked him many a question on

the subject. We can fancy them sitting with him many an evening talking the matter over. But, whether it be that he was allowed to tell them nothing, or that the things which he saw and heard could not be recorded in human language, or whether it is that he did satisfy their curiosity, but the Spirit of God has not seen fit to preserve the story in the Book of Inspiration, we cannot tell. We only know that nothing of his life above has reached us. We say—

“ ‘Where wert thou, brother, those four days?’

There lives no record of reply,

Which, telling what it is to die,

Had surely added praise to praise.

Behold a man raised up by Christ!

The rest remaineth unrevealed.

He told it not, or something sealed

The lips of that Evangelist.”

Still there is perhaps more information to be gleaned from the Bible regarding the occupations of heaven than is generally supposed. Let us see for ourselves.

For one thing, it is very certain that many of the popular notions on this subject are utter misconceptions. It is indeed painful to think of the inadequate, indefinite, even grotesque ideas about heaven which many hold, consciously or unconsciously. A common conception among a class by no means small is one little better than that of a huge singing school. It is the idea of a place without other employment than constantly standing

before the Divine Being and celebrating His praise. Perhaps you say, is not that the idea of heaven given us in the Bible? Do we not read that the saints are continually before the throne, and praise Him day and night in His temple? Are we not told over and over again of the songs, and the golden harps, and the voices as the sound of many waters? Certainly we are. But as we read such descriptions, please let us remember two things. First, let us recollect that the Book of Revelation, in which we find these accounts of heaven, is a figurative book. The descriptions which it gives us are beautiful and elaborate, and highly wrought. But they are poetical and symbolical. You do not expect really to see in heaven all that is described there,—a literal Tree of Life, precious stones in the foundations of the walls, or real crowns of gold on the heads of the saints. These things are figures,—figures certainly of great realities, but figures all the while. This is the first point to remember. The second is that John, who wrote this book, describes in it merely passing glimpses that he got of the heavenly land. He was not a dweller there at the time he wrote the Apocalypse. He only went to it in the spirit, and he only tells us how the inhabitants were occupied at the time he saw them. To suppose that they spend all their time in the way in which they were engaged when he obtained his brief view of them, would be about as correct as to believe that because some one, looking in upon a Christian congregation on a

Sabbath day, saw them engaged in worship, he might therefore conclude that all their days were spent only in acts of worship. To suppose that the sole occupation of heaven is singing is to suppose a very strange heaven, one which our natures must be completely changed before we could enjoy or appreciate, a heaven, moreover, in which, if we examine the Bible carefully, there is no ground whatever for believing.

There are three points about heaven which we must bear carefully in mind if we would have any correct idea of its occupations.

1. It is a place for men and women. This truth, obvious and self-evident though it may seem, cannot be too strongly insisted on. Of course heaven has other inhabitants. It is, as we have seen, God's dwelling-place, and the Cherubim and Angels constitute no small portion of its tenants. But, when we reach it, we shall find a place prepared for us (John xiv. 2). Now, death, whatever it does, does not change our nature. It does not transform us from men and women into angels. It does not make us different beings from what we are. We shall be men and women after death, as we are men and women now. There are three stages in human life—the stage of nature, the stage of grace, the stage of glory. When one passes from the state of nature into a state of grace, there is a great change, a marvellous change. The whole man—body, soul, and spirit—is not merely altered, but revolutionized. But the man is still a man as truly after conversion

as he was before ; and not only a man, but the same man, changed from the heart out, and yet with his identity unaltered. So, when one passes from the stage of grace into the stage of glory, there is another change, a stupendous change, the nature and extent of which we shall see by and by. But this change, like the other, does not make its subject cease to be a man. Death changes our habitation, evicting us from the house of clay. It unclothes us, strips off the garment of the flesh. But a change of habitation changes no one's nature. Still less does a change of dress. The soul is not altered by death, and the soul is the man. The fears of death, which many people distress themselves with, arise from forgetting all this. The good man's death is really only a flitting, a flitting from a poor house to one infinitely beautiful and happy. The man is the same man in both dwellings. His nature is no doubt refined, purified, elevated, and "made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." But it is the same nature, and he is the same person after the change of abode as before.

Now, if heaven is to be a place for men and women, its occupations must be such as are suited to men and women. Eternal singing would not be suited to them. It would weary us. It would not occupy all our nature. It would be useless. If we would have a correct idea of heaven, we must think of a place where all the holy powers and faculties of men and women will be engaged, pleasingly engaged,

profitably engaged. This may seem a simple and obvious thought. But by following it, we shall find that we have obtained a clue to a far juster conception of the joys of the blessed world than many people entertain.

2. Again, it will help us to have some adequate idea of heaven, if we recollect that earth is a preparation for it. Here we are in the vestibule of God's temple of life. We are at the outset of the eternal voyage. Now if this life be a preparation, and be intended to be a preparation, for the next, there must be a resemblance in the heavenly life to this. It is no doubt higher and holier by far. But unless it is in some degree like this, how can the life here be a preparation for it? A boy at school is being prepared for life in the world. No doubt there is a great difference between schoolboy life and the struggle of varied passions and clashing interests which make up the life of too many men and women. Still the boy-world is the bigger world in miniature after all. The arithmetic that he learns in the schoolroom is employed in after-life in the solution of real instead of imaginary problems. The book-keeping is to be practised in veritable ledgers and day-books. The geography is the world on paper. The strict discipline and hard mental exercise of the school are to fit him for waging successfully the battle of life, and even the sports of the playground have in them not a little resemblance to, and education for, the sterner occupations of the busy

world outside. True, the school-world is not just like the great world beyond its precincts. But there is the same human nature in both. Unless there were, the days spent under the schoolmaster's rod would be useless for the purpose for which they are intended. Now, if heaven does not bear a certain resemblance to earth, and its occupations to those here, this world can be no preparation for it. All the discipline here will go for nothing. We are now at a school which has no relation to the life it is intended to fit us for. Surely this cannot be. You remember how St. John reasons,—“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure” (1 John iii. 2, 3). That is to say, we are to imitate Jesus on this ground, that hereafter we hope to be liker Him than we are now. Here we have some faint resemblance to Him—alas! very faint. But we are to cultivate and develop this resemblance in the prospect of attaining a more complete likeness one day. We are at school here. Let us learn our lessons so diligently, that, when we emerge from the dominion of tutors and governors, we may be fitted for taking our place in the great world for which they are meant to prepare us.

3. Last of all, we are to remember that heaven is intended to restore man to the state from which he

has fallen. The object of Redemption is to undo the evil of the Fall, and make man again what he was before it took place. And heaven is the completion of Redemption. Now what was man before the Fall? Certainly he was man then as much as he is man now, endowed with man's nature, busied about human occupations. The difference was, that then there was no toil in these occupations, and that all the time he was busied about them he was in conscious and constant communion with God. But Adam in Eden was as veritable a man as he was afterwards, or as any of us is now. Indeed, he was more, rather than less, a man than we. He was the perfect, the ideal man. Now, if that be so, and if heaven is to be a restoration of that state, a bringing back of that happy time,—and everything points to the conclusion that it will be this,—then its life must be a life still suited for human beings. The circle which began in Eden must wind itself round until it ends in an Eden again.

You can see for yourselves the plain conclusions to which all these considerations point. Heaven is to be a place for men and women. Then it must be a place whose life and occupations will give full play to the faculties and aptitudes of men and women. We have a tripartite nature. We are composed of body, soul, and spirit, and all three will be in heaven. At the resurrection each good man's body, raised from the dust, and reunited to his soul, will enter glory. There must then be occupation

for the body there. There will be this difference between the body here and there, that in heaven it will be freed from everything which now clogs and confines it. Here we often feel that it is indeed the "body of our humiliation." The aching head, the weary fingers, hamper us and keep us back. In heaven there shall be no weariness. None shall say, "I am sick." There shall be no death. So with the mind. There will be no failure of memory, no reeling or decay of intellect, no dimness of understanding in heaven, and the soul, no longer "cabined, cribbed, confined" in a body having in it so many elements of weakness, will be able to take flights, and to expatiate in regions to which now it is and must be a stranger. As Dr. Norman Macleod beautifully says: "If we can imagine a man with his whole nature in a state of perfect health, each portion demanding and obtaining its appropriate nourishment, and with all his powers beautifully balanced and in perfect harmony with the plan of God, 'according to the effectual working in the measure of every part,' the senses ministering to the most refined tastes, the intellect full of light in the apprehension of truth and strong in its discovery, the moral being possessing perfect holiness and unerring subjection to the will of God, the love of society able to rest upon fitting objects and to find a full return for its sympathies in suitable companionships, while ample scope was afforded for activity by congenial labour, then would such a state be per-

fection or fulness of joy in God's presence here below. . . . Had perfect man been translated to another region, we cannot conceive his joy thereby to become essentially different in kind, though different in degree, supposing him to remain the same being and to possess the same human nature. Now man's fall has not altered this principle. Sin is a perversion of human nature, not its annihilation; a disorder of its powers, not their destruction. Nor is restoration by Jesus Christ the gift of a different constitution, as if He made us something else than human beings; but the renovation of the old constitution after its original type. It is making the 'old man,' diseased, bent down, paralysed, deaf, blind, the 'new man,' with frame erect, limbs strong, eyes and ears open, and all his powers fresh and vigorous for immortality; and, therefore, that which would constitute the happiness of man, were he perfect on earth, will be his happiness, though in a higher degree, when he is made perfect in heaven."¹

There is good reason for believing that the redeemed in heaven will be largely occupied in following out the favourite occupations which they had on earth. You say—"Surely it cannot be so. There is a miser. His favourite occupation on earth is to gather money. Do you ask us to believe that that is to be his favourite occupation in heaven too?" The answer comes by asking you another question—Will that miser be there? I am not going to

¹ *Parish Papers*, by Norman Macleod, D.D., p. 97.

answer the query. I merely ask it. It is for you to answer it. Or if you cannot, go to Paul, and hear what he says on the point. His words are very plain: "No covetous man (who is an idolater) hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Eph. v. 5). There is now-a-days an easy-going style of taking for granted that this person and that person will be in heaven as a matter of course, for which we shall have difficulty in finding sanction in the Bible. We are speaking now of those who shall be in heaven, who, being there, have got there by the only way by which any man can get to heaven, even by the new and living way opened in Jesus Christ our Lord, and who, being His followers, had not their portion in this life, but took up and carried their cross patiently on earth before they reached the crown above. Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. A prepared people must be a sanctified people, and a sanctified people must be a people of pure thoughts and holy purposes, and those pure thoughts and holy purposes which guided and governed the occupations of earth, will live on to prosecute, still further, similar occupations in heaven.

Perhaps, for example, you are a student. If so, you are often made painfully aware by bitter experience of the limitations by which your studies are shut in. The powers of both mind and body are limited. You often encounter high walls which rise across your path,—walls which you cannot climb. If, for instance, you are a student of the Bible, how

many mysteries you find to perplex you in its pages, mysteries which, in many cases, are to you utterly insoluble! Why is there evil in the world—the mystery of the divine decrees—“freewill, fixed fate, foreknowledge absolute”—who by searching can find out these? Even if you are only a student of nature, how many things there are which the keenest scalpel of the anatomist and the strongest microscope of the biologist cannot bring to light! Who has yet explained, who can explain, the mystery of being, the mystery of life, the mystery of growth? It is the same if you are a student of philosophy. Its problems fascinate but baffle you; you are perplexed by the rival claims of contending schools of thought. “Now we see through a glass darkly.” Yes, certainly it is so. No truer description of the state of our knowledge was ever given. Our hearts utter their solemn and sad Amen to it. But shall it be always so? Shall this painful dimness rest for ever upon our vision? Are we evermore to be forced to make the humbling confession—“Now we know in part”? No! “Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, then shall I know even as also I am known” (1 Cor. xiii. 12). What bright vistas into the dark future these words open!

We can easily conceive how they will be fulfilled. With bodies freed from all weakness, bodies that shall never any more know what it is to be tired, with minds whose every power shall be sharpened

and strengthened and intensified to a degree which to us is at present inconceivable, with souls enjoying with open face the vision of God, and with a light bathing us on every side, compared with which the brightest light of earth is darkness, a light unspeakable and full of glory, how easy all study will be as compared with now! How successful as easy! How delightful as successful! We read of Sir Isaac Newton weeping over one of his great discoveries, so overwhelming was the joy of it. If that was the feeling caused by a comparatively small scientific achievement here, what must the rapture be of an increase of knowledge flowing, in ever-swelling flood, upon the soul to all eternity!

Again, one of our greatest delights here is friendship. It has been well called the wine of life. He is a poor specimen of a man who has no joy in any one but himself, and no pleasure save in the advancement of his own interests. Sir Walter Scott's words are strong, but not too strong—

“The wretch, concentr'd all in self,
Living shall forfeit fair renown,
And, doubly dying, shall go down
To the vile earth from whence he sprung,
Unwept, unhonour'd, and unsung.”

But under what sad difficulties friendships are here fostered and pursued! There is, for example, the difficulty of distance. Families may be bound together by the fondest, strongest love, but how often

the most united family becomes scattered miles on miles apart! Love is not extinguished by distance. "Absence makes the heart grow fonder." But how circumscribed it makes the intercourse! How often we yearn to see the faces of our friends beyond the ocean, and to grasp their hands! How sad the thought that some of us will have to go down to the grave without ever seeing them again! But how gladsome that there shall be nothing of all this in heaven! What may be the exact exegesis of the words, "There shall be no more sea," it is difficult to say. But this, at all events, I take out of them, that in heaven there shall be no more separation. Space and time will not there offer the obstructions to intercourse that they do here. We and our friends shall be together—together for ever.

Then what new friendships there will be the opportunity of forming in heaven! Fancy the interest of hearing Abraham recount the story of Isaac, or Jacob telling us over again his dream, or Paul describing that day when he was caught up to the third heaven, or Luther repeating the story of the convent at Erfurt, or John Knox giving us, with his old fire, the tale of his contendings with Mary Queen of Scots at Holyrood. Imagine the delight of conversing with the great men of a nearer past. As we conjure up such scenes, we come to know what Bunyan felt and meant when, as he concludes the first part of his glorious dream with a description of what he saw in heaven, he says,

“Which when I had seen, I wished myself amongst them !”

A tuneful singer has well caught this idea of how each one's longings and ideals of bliss will be realized above, when he says—

“‘What is heaven?’ I asked a little child;
‘All joy!’ and in her innocence she smiled.

I asked an aged one with care oppressed.
‘All suffering o’er, oh, heaven at last is rest!’

I asked a maiden, meek and tender-eyed.
‘It must be love!’ she modestly replied.

I asked the artist who adored his art.
‘Heaven is all beauty!’ spoke his raptured heart.

I asked a poet, with his soul afire.
‘’Tis glory! glory!’ and he struck his lyre.

I asked the Christian, waiting her release,
A halo round her. Low she murmured, ‘Peace!’

So all may look with hopeful eyes above,
’Tis beauty, glory, joy, rest, peace, and love.”

I think there is reason to believe that one of the greatest joys of heaven will arise from the interest we shall still take in the scenes we have left behind us on earth. If memory is still to exist in heaven, as plainly it shall, if, instead of being impaired, it, in common with every other faculty, is to be strengthened and intensified to a degree now inconceivable, it is impossible that there should not be this interest.

We know how here, when absent from home, our

thoughts are still gravitating back thither. The truth is constantly receiving fresh proof—

“Where’er I go, where’er my footsteps roam,
My heart untravelled fondly turns to home.”

When the Irish emigrant sails away toward the West from the old homestead, his love for it, and the memory of the Emerald Isle, instead of fading and disappearing with the blue hills which sink in the evening shadows below the horizon, increase tenfold. When he tells his own story, he says—

“As slow our ship her foaming track
Against the wind was cleaving,
Her trembling pennant still looked back
To that dear land ’twas leaving.

So loath we part from those we love,
From all the links that bind us;
And thus we turn, where’er we rove,
To those we left behind us.”

Is it so on earth, and shall it be otherwise in heaven? Remember—we have seen that we are to be men and women there—and that we are to retain all our powers of memory and reflection, which means that we shall not forget. If this is to be so, you will see that it is inconceivable and impossible that, when we pass beyond the veil, we shall lose all interest in the scenes and persons which now occupy us.

Remember, again, what we have already seen—that death does not destroy, does not change us—that we shall be the same in heaven that we are here. Well, you could not forget your children here. They could not forget you. No distance

could break the tie between you and them. Will you forget them there? Or will they forget you? Impossible!

I believe, moreover, that the redeemed above are cognizant of what we are doing here below,—that, from behind the thin veil which severs us from them, they are looking down upon us constantly. Does the Bible say so? I believe it does. Even if it were silent on the subject, the considerations which have been already adduced would be sufficient for me at all events. But I do not think it is silent. What is the meaning, for example, of that oft-quoted verse: "Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. xii. 1, 2)? Who are these "witnesses"? The previous chapter tells us. They are the world's heroes of faith. They are now ascended on high. But from those grand heights which they have attained, the Apostle says they are "witnesses." Witnesses of what? Of how we who are left behind are running our race towards the heavenly goal. That seems a very plain intimation that they know what we are about. In the Gospel of Luke, again, we read: "I say unto you that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance" (Luke xv. 7). Most precious

teaching! What does it tell us? Why, something like this—In the house of God, hearts are being stirred under the preaching of a herald of the cross. At last one hearer, who has been, perhaps, long anxious about his soul, lays down the weapons of his rebellion and gives himself to God. Forthwith the news travels to the upper sanctuary, and at once every face beams with joy, and every heart is filled with gratitude. The angels rejoice. The saints rejoice. May we not believe that gladdest of all are his own friends in heaven—perhaps his parents, long dead, but who have not ceased to watch over him with loving solicitude, though they are in the other world and he in this,—perhaps his children gone before him?

The truth is, we make far too much of the distance between the two worlds, and of the separation between us here and our friends there. The Bible speaks of them and us as one family (Eph. iii. 15), and, if our faith were but a little stronger, we should see that all the members of this one family are alike under the eye and wing of God—near to each other, and near to Him. There is deep truth in the words—

“One family we dwell in Him,
One Church above, beneath,
Though now divided by the stream,
The narrow stream, of death.”

Active employment in doing God's will will doubtless form another chief element in the happiness of heaven. Have you noted the apparent

contradiction between such passages as say, "There remaineth a rest for the people of God" (Heb. iv. 9), and those which give us the impression of a perpetual busy-ness in heaven? They rest there, and yet they "rest not day nor night." There is here no real contradiction. Rest and inactivity are not synonymous terms.

"The want of occupation is not rest,
A mind quite vacant is a mind distressed."

There is work which is really rest, and there is cessation from work which is the direst toil. Heaven is all rest, but that is a very different thing from saying that its life is a scene of idle inactivity. There is no weariness known within its bounds, but there is a constant occupation in the holiest works. The language of each of God's servants there is the language of the Son of God: "I delight to do Thy will, O God."

"Resting, but not in slumb'rous ease,
Working, but not in wild unrest,
Still ever blessing, ever blest,
They see us as the Father sees."

But the best element in the happiness of that joyous world is doubtless the close, constant communion with Christ which always prevails there. This is indescribable. To think that we shall see with these very eyes the Man of Sorrows—that we shall look upon His blessed face—that we shall hear His voice, and touch His hand, and be "for ever with the Lord"—oh, there is in that single

thought a wealth of bliss sufficient of itself to make a heaven, though every other element of happiness were absent! All of us have often echoed the sentiment of the hymn which our children sing,—

“ I think, when I read that sweet story of old,
How when Jesus was here among men,
He gathered the children like lambs to His fold,
I could wish to have been with them then.

I could wish that His hands had been laid on my head,
That His arms had been thrown around me ;
And that I could have heard His sweet voice as He said :
‘ Let the little ones come unto me.’ ”

And we have envied the disciples walking and talking with Jesus among the hills of Galilee, along the slopes of Olivet, and on the shores of the Lake of Gennesaret. Well, we shall have just such intercourse with Him in heaven. “ Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty.” When we “ depart,” we shall be “ with Christ.” We shall dwell for ever with departed loved ones ; but, what is more blessed and important by far, we shall dwell “ for ever with the Lord.” Here we have some nearness to Him. But at the best it is a distant nearness. We see Him, but it is “ through a glass darkly.” We hear His voice with the ear of faith, but the voice sometimes sounds indistinct and far away. But then, oh blissful prospect ! “ we shall see Him as He is,” and His voice shall be the voice of one close at hand. That thought should swallow up every other.

Sometimes, when sitting up at night in a sick-room, you have noticed that, when daybreak drew on,

the lights in the room began to appear dim. You have looked out into the street, and the lamps, which an hour ago looked bright and cheerful, now appear yellow and sickly, and by and by, as the sunlight gathers strength, they grow invisible altogether. So we have many loves and friendships here which we prize as lights in a dark place. In heaven we shall enjoy and prize them too. But, compared with the enjoyment of Christ Himself, they shall be only as those lights in the sick-room when the great sun has risen in his strength. He will fill all things—all eyes—all hearts—all thoughts. Much as we shall love others, our song will be, not of them, but of “Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His blood.” “For ever with the Lord ’ is the believer’s hope—

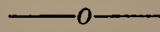
“For ever with the Lord !

Amen ! so let it be :

Life from the dead is in that word,

’Tis immortality.”

CHAPTER VII.



Children in Heaven.

CHAPTER VII.

CHILDREN IN HEAVEN.

OF all topics connected with the subject we are discussing, none comes home to a wider circle than the thought of children in heaven.

“There is no fireside, howsoe’er defended,
But has one vacant chair;
There is no flock, however watched and tended,
But one dead lamb is there.

The air is full of farewells for the dying,
And mournings for the dead.
The heart of Rachel, for her children crying,
Will not be comforted.”

You cannot help thinking, O mother, often and sadly, of that little one you have in heaven. You remember the day when the coffin came home for her; and oh! how well you remember the first night after it went away again, carrying in it that sweet little form. As you sat in your loneliness, you could well enter into the poet’s words,—

“No mother’s eye beside thee wakes to-night,
No taper burns beside thy lonely bed;
Darkling thou liest, hidden out of sight,
And none are near thee but the silent dead.

How cheerily glows this hearth, yet glows in vain ;
For we, uncheered, beside it sit alone,
And listen to the wild and beating rain
In angry gusts against our casement blown.

And, though we nothing speak, yet well I know
That both our hearts are there where thou dost keep,
Within thy narrow chamber far below,
For the first time unwatched, thy lonely sleep."

Let us talk for a little about the children in heaven.

I. Let us speak of the children of Believers. Here, happily, we can tread on the firmest of firm ground. The light which shines upon them in the other world is as clear as could be. From the very beginning of the Bible we see them included with their parents in the Covenant. Under the Jewish economy they were marked for God with the seal of circumcision, and the recognition which He thus gave them has never been withdrawn. For we are the children of Abraham. So Paul argues in the Epistle to the Galatians. "It is written," he says, "that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. . . . We are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free" (Gal. iv. 22, 31). Again, in the Epistle to the Romans, he tells us that we have been "grafted in" among the branches of the Israelitish stock, so as with them to partake "of the root and fatness of the olive tree." God has not had two Churches in the world, the Jewish and the Gentile. Since time began there has only been one Church, one Church though with

two dispensations. So, if the Almighty has once admitted the children into His visible Church, and never cancelled that admission, they are in it still. For nearly two thousand years before the Advent they were acknowledged as in it; and in all the two thousand years which have passed since, not so much as a word has been spoken to indicate any change in the will of God concerning them. On the contrary, by word and deed the great Head of the Church has shown in the clearest manner that that will of His concerning them remains unchanged. The membership of infants who are children of believers therefore remains unchanged. "A divine law cannot be set aside by anything short of divine authority, and divine authority for depriving the children of a right which they enjoyed for two thousand years is something that up to the present time has never yet been brought forward."¹ Marked as God's in infancy, in accordance with His own bidding, they cannot be refused as His above.

Peter's famous Pentecostal sermon speaks very decidedly regarding children. "The promise," he says, "is unto you and to your children" (Acts ii. 39). Paul and Silas give, if possible, a still plainer indication of the will of God concerning them in the Christian dispensation. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," they said to the Philippian jailer, "and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts xvi. 31). Too

¹ *Scriptural Baptism, its Mode and Subjects.* By Thomas Witherow, D.D.

often, when this classic text is quoted, those closing three words are left out. Yet how precious they are! They tell us that when a man is a believer, not only does his faith bless himself, but his children somehow share the blessings of it with him. He is saved, and the same authority which tells us so, tells us also that his family, through his faith, come into the Covenant. To the same purport are Paul's words—"The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy" (1 Cor. viii. 14).

Yes, our children are taken together with us into the Covenant. In some mysterious manner they share with us both its privileges and blessings. If any inducement were needed to lead a man to come to Christ, in addition to the good which will thereby accrue to himself, it is surely found in this, that, so coming, he not only obtains blessings for himself but for his children. And if such blessings are obtained, if those children are thus brought within the pale of that Covenant of Grace in connection with which all our mercies are enjoyed, can we doubt that, passing away in infancy, they go to inherit its rich fruits in the bright world beyond the stars?

II. But what of the infants of Unbelievers? It must at once be acknowledged that the evidence in favour of their salvation is not so perfect as in the case just considered. To me, however, it seems convincing enough. I believe that they too, dying in

infancy, without doubt get to heaven. Why? (1.) Because of the character of God. "God is love." No earthly father ever loved his children as God loves us. Too much has, doubtless, been sometimes built on the love of God. It has been argued,—God is love, therefore He will not punish me for my sins. The minor premise here is correct; but the major is wrong, and therefore so is the conclusion. The syllogism is a faulty one. But the case before us is one of quite another kind. I hold it to be inconceivable that a Being whose nature is so imbued with love that the only mode in which He can be correctly described is by saying that He is love itself, could doom infants who have never committed one actual sin to everlasting destruction. Would He be love if He did? Who could say so?

(2.) Besides, the mode in which children are spoken of in the Bible shows us plainly that such a thing is impossible. They are called "an heritage of the Lord" (Ps. cxxvii. 3). They are repeatedly held up to us as models for our imitation. "Jesus called a little child unto Him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for

him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt. xviii. 2-6). Often we invert our Lord's teaching. He said we must become as little children, if we are ever to be in His kingdom. We say, and oftener think, that the little children must become men and women before they can be in it. Is not the Master's teaching best?

He puts the matter very plainly in another passage—"Then were there brought unto Him little children, that He should put His hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven. And He laid His hands on them" (Matt. xix. 13-15). These words may well be called the children's Magna Charta. Mark what they say. "Of such"—of children, and such as children—the kingdom of heaven consists. Possibly there are more children than adults both in the Church below and the Church above. It is not of the children of converted parents that Christ here speaks. It is of children generally. If we had not a solitary text save this on which to rest our belief in the final salvation of infants, would it not be well founded?

In the Old Testament there is one instructive statement bearing on this subject which is not as much known as it should be. When God was doom-
ing the Israelites to exclusion from Canaan on account of their sins, Moses describes Him as saying, "Surely

there shall not one of these men of this evil generation see that good land, which I swear to give unto your fathers, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh. He shall see it, and to him will I give the land that he hath trodden upon, and to his children, because he hath wholly followed the Lord. Also the Lord was angry with me for your sakes, saying, Thou also shalt not go in thither, but Joshua the son of Nun, which standeth before thee, he shall go in thither ; encourage him ; for he shall cause Israel to inherit it." Then follow words specially to be noted—"Moreover, your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, and your children, which in that day had no knowledge between good and evil, they shall go in thither, and unto them will I give it, and they shall possess it" (Deut. i. 35-39). The analogy between the case of these children and ours is apparent. Those Israelitish parents were unfaithful and unbelieving, and suffered a sore punishment for their faults. But their unoffending children were not allowed to suffer that punishment. Why? Because they "had no knowledge between good and evil." Their innocence saved them. So now, parents may, if they please, shut themselves out of heaven by disobedience and unbelief. But "their little ones," are they to be shut out? No doubt God does visit the iniquities of fathers upon their children to the third and fourth generation. But will not the same reason which kept Him from visiting this iniquity upon the Israelites' children to their destruction still keep

Him from shutting out the little ones from our promised land? He is the same God now as He was then.

But perhaps you say, "Are we not told in Scripture that salvation hinges on faith? Infants cannot exercise faith in Christ. How then is it possible for them to be saved?" Now, most certainly salvation is by faith—by faith alone. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house," is God's plan of salvation, and "there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." But God's commands are always to be considered in connection with the parties to whom they were given. Lose sight of this obvious principle, and you constantly land yourself in confusion. To whom then are these commands to believe, which are so plentifully scattered over the Bible, addressed? Will any one say that the Bible is written for infants? Was it expected by its divine Author that infants would read it and master its contents? When it is said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned," are infants contemplated or addressed? Who shall say they are? "Well, then," you perhaps say, "the heathen may be saved on your principles, and yet be heathen still." It is well to make no affirmation about the heathen other than what the Bible makes. But it is clear that they stand in a quite different position from infants. Paul argues that "they are without excuse"

(Rom. i. 20). He says they have two means of knowing God. If they have not revelation, they have conscience, and they have God's works daily and nightly proclaiming "His eternal power and Godhead."

But are infants capable of knowing God by these means? They are not. Conscience is undeveloped within them. They cannot profit by the light of nature. Take another class, who in this respect stand in the same category as infants—the large body of imbeciles, idiots, lunatics, which every country contains, and which in our own country is increasing to so alarming an extent. These unfortunate creatures are infants in understanding. They cannot believe. They have not the wit to do so. They cannot even comprehend either salvation or the way to it. Are they therefore doomed? Forbid the thought, you say! Yet the same arguments which include them in the pale of salvation include also the little ones. No, "God is not unrighteous." His Bible is addressed to those capable of understanding it. To insist on its terms being complied with by those to whom it was never intended to apply, and who are incapable of even comprehending its meaning, much less of obeying its mandates, is as if the State should demand the performance of the duties of citizenship, not only by its adult subjects, but by its babes and sucklings.

Besides, in all the commands which emphasize the necessity of faith, it is noticeable that provision is

actually made for the children. In the case of Abraham, the father of the faithful, the promise was to him and his children; and, as we have already seen, the command to "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" is accompanied not only by the promise of salvation to the individual believer, but to his house. The children were contemplated in both cases, and their inclusion in the benefits of the covenant expressly arranged.

Well, then, you say, it comes to this, that children are saved apart from Christ? They cannot exercise faith on Him, and they are saved without Him. Certainly not. None, child or adult, will ever stand in glory but by His merits. Child and adult must alike be born again, or they shall not see the kingdom of God. It is regeneration that makes a child of God. But regeneration is by the Holy Spirit, and if that Holy Spirit is like wind, which "bloweth where it listeth," who is going to limit His operations? We have no revelation as to how He deals with infants. We have nothing to do with that dealing, no practical effort to make in connection with it, and therefore the Scriptures are silent on the subject. But if we read, as we do, of children that were God's "from their mothers' wombs," if we read of Him choosing children "not yet born, neither yet having done good or evil," then that infants may be His from the very earliest moment of their existence is clear as noonday. The mode in which they become so is not our concern. The fact is what we have to do with.

And the fact is plain. The character of God, His recorded dealings with men, the statements of His Word, all demand that we shall believe that the infants of believer or unbeliever, dying in infancy, shall be taken to Himself.

There is sound theology as well as quaint thought in old Robert Robinson's epitaph over the remains of his four children,—

“Bold infidelity, turn pale and die !
Beneath this stone four infants' ashes lie ;
Say, are they lost or saved ?
If death's by sin, they sinned, for they lie here ;
If heaven's by works, in heaven they can't appear.
Reason—ah ! how depraved !
Revere the Bible's sacred page, the knot's untied,
They died, for Adam sinned ; they live, for Jesus died.”

Some people interested in the question of the salvation of infants have been perplexed by a passage in the Westminster Confession of Faith which deals with the matter. The words are these : “Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when and where and how He pleaseth. So also are all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.” Part of this statement is plain and clear. It will be seen that the Westminster Divines bear out what we have already been arguing, viz. that the Holy Spirit regenerates infants. How He does so we need not inquire ; He works “when and where and how He pleaseth.” It is also plain that they include infants, as we have

done, in the same category as others "who are incapable of being called by the ministry of the Word," viz. persons of unsound mind. So far, their statement is plain and satisfactory. But the point which perplexes some lies in that phrase—"Elect infants." They say, does not the expression "Elect infants" imply that some infants are non-elect, and therefore not saved? If this be so, then certainly the Westminster Divines are at issue with us on this question. Let us see.

Now there can be no doubt that election implies rejection, or at all events non-election or passing over. But the question is—the non-election or rejection of whom? Of other infants, or of other persons of the general body of humanity? There is the greatest difference, it will at once be seen, between the two alternatives. If we conclude that the language of the Westminster Divines means, and was intended to mean, that out of the whole number of infants born into the world some are elected and others not, then the matter is settled, so far as their authority is concerned, and settled against the position which we have taken up in this chapter. In that case, all infants who die in infancy are not saved. Some are lost. Because none can be saved who have not been elected to salvation. If, however, we conclude, on the other hand, that the statement merely lays down the principle that all infants who are saved must have been elected to salvation, that they could not be saved without this election, and if we conclude

further, that it affirms nothing regarding the election save and except that it took place, and that it was an election, not of some infants to the exclusion of others, but of infants, leaving the number undetermined, out of the general body of humanity, then a very different aspect indeed is put upon the passage, and it is seen to affirm nothing whatever on the point at issue. It seems perfectly plain that the latter is the meaning of the Westminster Divines. They could not tell from Scripture what infants were elected to salvation. They had no data bearing on the subject to go upon, and they were not the men to make assertions without adequate grounds. They state the case of infants here with a scriptural accuracy which is worthy of all admiration. They say that all infants who die in infancy, and have been elected to salvation, will be saved. They do not take upon them to say whether the number of such will be great or small, whether it will include all infants or not; and proceeding, as they did throughout their work, on the principle of setting down nothing as the truth of God for which undoubted scriptural evidence could not be adduced, they could not well go further. Their deliverance therefore settles nothing as to the point we are considering. It simply assures us of the fact of infant salvation, but makes no statement whatever as to the number of infants so saved.

Another question is sometimes put — What of children who die unbaptized? Can they be in

heaven? Or does the fact of their not having received this rite of the Church exclude them?

Augustine did not hesitate to reply that the lack of baptism was fatal. Children who die without it might, indeed, receive a *mitissima damnatio*, but a *damnatio* they would certainly undergo. The Church of Rome, too, speaks very decidedly on the point. She asserts that to be excluded from baptism is to be excluded from heaven. Her authorized catechism, the Catechism of the Council of Trent, teaches that all will perish eternally who are not renewed by the grace of baptism (II. ques. 25). Neither at death, nor ever after, can infants who die unbaptized be admitted into heaven.¹ Their souls descend immediately into hell, into what they call the *Limbus Infantum*. As to the nature of the punishment which they undergo there, opinions differ; some holding, with Pope Innocent III., that they simply endure the loss of heaven; others, that they suffer horrible agonies of torment. Dante, true to the teaching of his Church, places all unbaptized infants in the *Inferno*, without hope of deliverance. In

¹ "What is certain, yea, a matter of faith, we have from the decisions of the Second Council of Lyons and the Council of Florence, both of which declare concerning infants and idiots: 'Credimus . . . illorum animas qui in mortali peccato vel cum solo originali decedunt mox in infernum descendere, pœnis tamen disparibus puniendas.' Ita quidem Florentinum 'in decreto Unionis' quod descripsit verba Lugdunensis in fidei professione. De fide igitur est (1) parvulos ejusmodi in infernum descendere seu damnationem incurrere; (2) pœnis puniori disparibus ab illis quibus puniuntur adulti" (Perrone, *Prælectiones Theologicæ*, i. 494).

holding this view, Rome is consistent with herself. With her, baptism is equivalent to regeneration. It removes all sin, and sanctifies the soul. It conveys to the recipient all the benefits of the redemption of Christ, and is the only divinely appointed channel of their communication.¹ All who hold by the doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration, if they consistently follow out their principles, must hold the same view.

It may be doubted, too, whether all good Protestants are quite free from the notion that baptism is indispensable to salvation. Certainly many people who would be horrified to be thought tinctured in the slightest degree with Roman Catholic ideas have a dread of their children dying unbaptized, which it is difficult to account for if they do not regard the sacrament as absolutely necessary to salvation. How often the minister is summoned at dead of night to baptize an infant supposed to be dying! Such applications should not be refused without grave reason. We have no right to withhold the sacraments of the Church from any entitled to receive them. But, if these requests arise from a belief that, should a child die unbaptized, its salvation would be lost, or even imperilled, then those who hold such a view know little of the nature of this or any sacrament, and

¹ “Exponendum erit hujus sacramenti virtute nos non solum a malis quæ vere maxima dicenda sunt, liberari, verum etiam eximiis bonis augeri. Animus enim noster divina gratia repletur, qua justî et filii Dei effecti æternæ quoque salutis heredes instituimur” (*Catechismus Romanus*, ii. 38).

know still less of the way of salvation. It is a very high doctrine regarding both sacraments which is taught in the Bible and explained in the Shorter Catechism,—many people scarcely realize how high. That incomparable little manual teaches that “A sacrament is an holy ordinance instituted by Christ, wherein, by sensible signs, Christ and the benefits of the new covenant are represented, *sealed, and applied* to believers.” It tells us that the sacraments may “become effectual means of salvation,” a statement which is not weakened by the safeguarding clauses which tell us that this efficacy does not arise “from any virtue in them nor in him that doth administer them, but only by the blessing of Christ and the working of His Spirit in them that by faith receive them.” In the Lord’s Supper, we are told, the worthy receivers are “made partakers of His body and blood to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace ;” though, again, the statement is safeguarded by the statement that this partaking is “not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith.” In regard to baptism the doctrine inculcated is equally high, for we are told that therein “the washing with water in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost doth signify and seal our engrafting into Christ.” All this is undoubtedly high doctrine, but it is no higher than the doctrine of Scripture. There is no Baptismal Regeneration taught or involved in it. The Westminster Divines knew their Bibles too well to hold any such figment. In their “Con-

fession " they expressly say—" Although it be a great sin to condemn or neglect this ordinance (baptism), yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it, or that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated " (Conf. xxviii. 5). It is difficult to see how any man who takes the Bible as his guide can hold otherwise. The penitent thief was saved without baptism. And Simon Magus, although duly baptized, and that by apostolic hands, was pronounced to be still "in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity," and to have "no part nor lot in the matter." Paul's sins were remitted before he was baptized, and Cornelius received the Holy Spirit before he received the same outward sign of regeneration. It requires something mightier, and something which can reach deeper than any Church rite, to cleanse sin away. "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin." "The washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost" makes us pure and holy, and nothing else than these. It is a wonder that any who have the Bible in their hands can believe or teach otherwise.

That every child should be baptized, and that at the earliest possible moment, is clear. But to make the salvation of any child dependent upon its baptism—in other words, dependent upon the fidelity and punctuality of its parents—is far indeed from the teaching of Holy Scripture. Where is there so

much as a single verse of the Bible which can be quoted in favour of such a doctrine ?

A question sometimes asked with regard to children in heaven is—will they be always children ? You lost a child in infancy, let us suppose. You want to know shall it be an infant still when you meet it in glory ? Or will your little girl have grown into a mature or aged woman, your little boy into a man ? It is impossible to avoid putting such questions to ourselves, and all who have lost children must be interested to know what answer is to be given to them.

The poet Longfellow has given one answer. Speaking of the death of a child, he says,—

“Not as a child shall we again behold her ;
For when, with raptures wild,
In our embraces we again enfold her,
She will not be a child,

But a fair maiden, in her Father's mansion,
Clothed with celestial grace,
And beautiful with all the soul's expansion,
Shall we behold her face.”

But another poet replies thus to the American songster,—

“Oh, say not so, for I would clasp her even
As when below she lay upon my breast ;
I would dream of her as a bud in heaven
Amid the blossoms blest.

Yes, as a child, serene and noble poet—
Oh, heaven were dark were children wanting there !
I hope to clasp my bud as when I wore it,
A dimpled baby fair.

E'en as a babe, my little dove-eyed daughter,
Nestle and coo upon my heart again,
Wait for thy mother by the living water,
It shall not be in vain.

Wait as a child ! How shall I know my darling,
If changed her form and veiled with shining hair ?
If since her flight has grown my little starling,
How shall I know her there ?”

Which of the two views is correct ?

As the poets differ on the matter, so do the divines. Some hold that those who die children will be children still in heaven. Others as strongly contend that they will and must grow, that to argue otherwise would be to argue for the continuance of imperfection above, inasmuch as childhood is an incomplete humanity. Which opinion is right ?

In reality there are two questions here to be settled. It will be best to keep them separate.

1. There is the question whether, between death and the resurrection, the child ceases to be a child, and passes on into manhood or womanhood. As to this, let it be remembered that during this interval the little body remains in the grave where it was laid after death, or rather, that it moulders to its kindred dust. But it is the growth of the body that we are speaking of. Perhaps not altogether, for the mind grows with the body. But what specially weighs with the bereaved mother is—will her child's bodily appearance be changed ?—will the little one be a little one no more ? Now, can the

body grow in the grave? Will that dust which, when laid there, was the dust of a child, become, as it lies, the dust of a man or woman? Surely we have no reason to believe any such thing, but every reason to be quite convinced of the opposite, viz. that the body that is buried will be the body that will rise again. Of course, every one knows that a change will pass over the body at the resurrection. "It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Cor. xv. 42). But the same person will be raised that was buried, and it is not easy even to conceive that the dust in the interval can have transformed itself from being the dust of a child into being that of a man or woman.

Moreover, if the dead who emerge from the graves at the sound of the last trump are not to be the same as those who were laid there, what about the possibility of our recognising them again? If the child that was buried has become in the interval a woman or a man, how should we know it? True, a corresponding difficulty is sure to present itself on the other side. The mother who lost a babe when she herself was young, may live to be an old grey-headed woman before she is called to her rest, and the question may suggest itself, How is her child to know her, so changed as she will be? But, if what has been previously advanced in these pages be correct as to the cognizance which the redeemed

in glory will still have of earthly scenes, this difficulty disappears; for, if it be the case that the saints can look down upon earth and see those who are still there, then we may be sure that the child in glory will, above all other places, keep a loving eye upon the old home, and watch with interest the grey hairs sprinkling themselves on the mother's head, and the wrinkles creeping over her face, so that at the Great Day the change in her look will be no matter of surprise.

2. There is a second question, viz. whether after the resurrection the child will grow as it would have grown on earth. The body will then have been raised up and reunited to the soul, so that the child will no longer be the disembodied spirit which it was from death to that great Last Day, but composed once more, as on earth, of body, soul, and spirit. Growth now is conceivable. Moreover, the difficulty about recognition has disappeared, because, if there is to be growth from this time forward, it will be growth, as on earth, in the view and the society of friends. As to whether there shall be such a growth, however, we really do not know. If there will, various questions suggest themselves. If the infant is to grow, and to be no longer an infant, when is this growth to cease? When infancy merges into childhood, is the child to grow? In heaven are the young men and maidens to advance to maturity? And are those who died in maturity

to become old? Where is the growth to cease? What is its limit to be? According to what rule is it to proceed?

The truth is, we know nothing whatever about all this style of things. We have not sufficient light to guide us to any conclusion regarding it. Nor, really, is it important what conclusion we come to. The one point which really interests those who have had children snatched away from them by death is whether they shall meet them again, and whether those little ones shall still be the little ones they parted from on the funeral day. That point we can settle in the affirmative. The children will be children still. As to the rest—may we not safely leave it, as we must perforce leave so many things about our future, to the wisdom and love of Him who “doeth all things well,” and who will be sure to settle all for the best? The essential point is, that when we meet our loved and lost again at the Great Day, when the father stands beside his son, and the mother clasps her long-buried daughter’s hand again, they shall be the same, unaltered, as when they passed away,—

“That so before the Judgment-seat
Though changed and glorified each face,
Not unremembered we may meet,
For endless ages to embrace.”

There is surely much comfort for the bereaved in all these thoughts about children in heaven. In the

light of them, may not the most broken-hearted mourner say,—

“Sleep, little baby, sleep!
Not in thy cradle bed,
Not on thy mother’s breast,
Henceforth shall be thy rest,
But with the quiet dead.

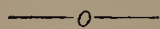
God took thee in His mercy,
A lamb, untasked, untried.
He fought the fight for thee,
He won the victory,
And thou art sanctified.

I look around and see
The evil ways of men,
And, O beloved child,
I’m more than reconciled
To thy departure then.

Now, like a dewdrop shrined
Within a crystal stone,
Thou’rt safe in heaven, my dove,
Safe with the source of love,
The Everlasting One.

And, when the hour arrives
From flesh that sets me free,
Thy spirit shall await,
The first at heaven’s gate
To wait and welcome me!”

CHAPTER VIII.



Do they know one another in Heaven?

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DO THEY KNOW ONE ANOTHER IN HEAVEN ?

MANY a time the question has been asked — Shall we know one another in heaven ? Volumes have been written upon it. Scarcely any one but has had his and her thoughts about it. Specially, it may be safely said that there is no one who has friends in heaven who has not many a time anxiously inquired—Shall I know them again when I get there ? Shall the mother know her child, the child she bore and nursed and lost, over whose coffin she wept so inconsolably, by whose lonely grave she so often and so sadly sits ? Or shall she and it be strangers to each other in heaven—both there, yet neither recognising the other ? Shall the children know their mother, or shall all the loving intercourse of earth be a thing forgotten and never to be renewed ? Is all friendship to end at death, to pass away as a thing of the earth earthy ? The great men of other days, the Abrahams and the Davids and the Isaiahs, the Johns and the Pauls and the Peters, the Polycarps

and the Augustines and the Chrysostoms, the Luthers and Calvins and Knoxes—shall we meet and know them in heaven, or shall we not? To say that these questions are interesting, is to say little. They are of absorbing importance. They are questions which we must get answered. We cannot form any clear notion of the society of the blest until we have them resolved.

The poets, who often best voice the deepest yearnings of humanity, have frequently allowed these wistful questionings to speak in their songs. Many lines referring to the subject are familiar. Here is a recent musing about it which the reader may perhaps thank me for reproducing. It is by an American poetess, Miss Larcom, and is entitled "Meeting Again,"—

"When for me the silent oar
Parts the silent river,
And I stand upon the shore
Of the strange For Ever,
Shall I miss the loved and known?
Shall I vainly seek mine own?

'Mid the crowd that come to meet
Spirits sin-forgiven,—
Listening to their echoing feet
Down the streets of heaven,—
Shall I know a footstep near
That I listen, wait for here?

Then will one approach the brink
With a hand extended,
One whose thoughts I loved to think
Ere the veil was rended,
Saying, 'Welcome! we have died
And again are side by side.'

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Saying, 'I will go with thee
That thou be not lonely,
To yon hills of mystery;
I have waited only
Until now, to climb with thee
Yonder hills of mystery.'

Can the bonds that make us here
Know ourselves immortal,
Drop away like foliage sere
At life's inner portal?
What is holiest below
Must for ever live and grow."

What answer is to be given to the anxious inquiries of the heart as to whether we shall or shall not know one another when we meet in heaven?

Speaking frankly, these questionings seem very unnecessary. Any other idea than that we shall know our friends in heaven appears almost unthinkable. Put to yourself the contrary supposition for a moment. What does it mean? Why, it means that heaven shall be peopled by a great company of utter strangers—worse than strangers, indeed, for strangers thrown into one another's company on earth soon grow into acquaintance. Half an hour's chat in a railway carriage is often sufficient to begin a lifelong friendship. But, on the supposition now referred to, we are to sit together in heaven to all eternity without knowing each other, without recognising that the friend to whom we speak was once a near neighbour, a relative, a child, a wife, a mother.

There are two brothers, let us suppose. They were nursed at the same breast, lived in the same house, went to the same school, played the same games, rambled through the same fields. They separate; one goes to the antipodes to push his fortune, the other to America, and for long neither hears of the other. After forty years' absence there is a chance meeting. How changed both are! How difficult to recognise in the great, brown-bearded men the striplings of the old village of their youth! Yet how short a time they are together till some chance word, some stray remark or reference, leads to recognition!

Two young men from the same parish in the Highlands of Scotland once enlisted in different regiments. After the lapse of many years, the regiments lay in the same cantonments in Canada. But, though they often met, these two who had been comrades in the old country did not recognise each other, till on a day in spring a thaw came, and, memory travelling back to the old times among the hills of Perthshire, one said,—

“Why, this is a Glentore thaw.”

“A Glentore thaw? What do you know of Glentore?” was the quick response.

“Well, I ought to know something of it; it's my birthplace,” said the other.

In a few minutes that one chance phrase led to recognition and to a renewal of the old comradeship. Shall it be so on earth—shall it be

impossible for men to be in each other's society for even a few hours without making acquaintance—shall those long separated not be able to come together in a strange land without soon being led to recognition—and shall it be different in heaven? There, shall those, who lived together here, live together again for all eternity and not know each other? The thing is impossible, unless in heaven we are to cease altogether to be the men and women we are here.

There is an Oriental fable which tells that, according to the doctrine of transmigration, a certain human soul once dwelt in a dove, another in a swallow, and a third in a lark. All three birds lived in the same cage, but with liberty to roam abroad, and many a happy excursion they had underneath a blue Eastern sky, round dizzy cliffs, through green, cool woods. By and by the time came when they must all be born into the human family. The soul of the dove entered a little child, that of the swallow a brother of that child, and that of the lark a sister, two years being between each two births; and so all three came again to be inmates of the same house. They did not for a time know that they had been companions before. As they grew up, however, they began to speak together about the past, about the cage where they used to live, about the merry flights they had once enjoyed, about the narrow escapes they had often had from the sportsman's arrow and the eagle's

talons, and in a little they recognised each other again. Like those birds, we now live in the same house, take the same walks, enjoy the same pleasures. Can it be that when, not by transmigration but by translation, we leave this style of existence and pass into another, there shall be no recollection of the past—that all the old love shall be faded, all the old acquaintance forgotten? The thing is impossible.

It is at all events a strong presumption in favour of the doctrine of recognition in heaven, that in all ages men have believed in it. It is an ancient maxim that we may safely believe *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*. Give us anything to which all humanity bears testimony, and we may accept it as true. Take the belief in immortality, for example, or the belief in a God, or the conviction that there is a future state of rewards and punishments, almost without exception these beliefs are held by all mankind, and have been so held in all ages. Through the conscience of universal man the voice of God attests their truth. Now, our masters of philosophy tell us that such world-wide acceptance of any belief goes far to prove its truth. Dugald Stewart, for instance, says—"The universal concurrence of mankind in the belief of any proposition is a strong presumption, or rather a positive evidence, that this belief has a foundation in the principles of our nature." And if it has a foundation in the principles of our nature, is it not proved to have a foundation in fact?

This doctrine of recognition in heaven seems to be one of these almost, if not altogether, universally received truths. I do not speak of Christian nations only when I say so, but of nations which existed long before the Christian era, and of others outside the pale of Christianity. I speak even of savage races. Readers of Plato will remember how Socrates revelled in the prospect of meeting and conversing with Homer and Hesiod in the world after death. Cicero speaks with enthusiasm of the delight he anticipated in enjoying the society of Cato amid the assembly of the gods. The Greek and Latin classics people Tartarus and Elysium with spirits, and give us frequent pictures of their intercourse. No other thought seems to have entered the minds of the men of cultured antiquity than that there should be not merely another life after this, but another where men would meet and converse and love again as here. It is so still. In the Coral Islands of the Pacific the savage mother, mourning for her dead child, comforts herself with the thought that she and it shall meet again, and know and love once more. In India the practice of widow-burning arose out of the same belief, the wife being supposed to manifest her affection for her departed husband by not remaining after him in this world, but following with all speed into another, where he and she could be together again. The American Indian bears testimony to the same general idea, when he stretches his arms to the summits of the blue mountains and

longs for the time when he and his faithful dog shall be with his ancestors. It is not the Bible that has produced this widespread belief in a state of future recognition. It is the voice of nature that has taught it, the voice of nature which surely here is the voice of God. Is it not the same among ourselves? Leave Scripture teaching aside for the moment, forget altogether what it says on this matter, divest your minds if you can of the impressions it has produced, and is there not still an instinctive feeling in us all that we shall know our friends again in the other world? Can we imagine anything else? Is not any other thought horrible? Could all the divines in the world persuade us that we shall not know our own again in heaven? And are we to suppose that God has implanted this belief, this expectation in our bosoms, for the purpose of mocking us?

It is to be remembered, as has already been shown, that heaven is a place for human beings. We shall not be transmuted into angels when we reach it. Purified, no doubt, we shall be, and ennobled, and exalted, but we shall still be men and women. Quite true, our bodies shall be changed. They shall be made like unto Christ's own glorious body. But was Christ less a man after His resurrection than before? Is He less the Son of Man now than He was on earth? We are told in Scripture that we shall in the future be made "like unto the angels." But do the angels not know each other? Are Gabriel and Michael strangers? Are the angelic

hosts grains of sand, without union, or coherence, or acquaintance, or fellowship? By and by we shall be immortal like the angels. We shall do the will of God perfectly like the angels. We shall be happy like the angels. We shall be spiritual beings like the angels. But we shall not cease to be men and women. And heaven would not be a place for men and women if it were not a social place. Man is not a solitary being. It is not good for him to be alone. It is not his nature to be alone. He must and will have companionships, bad companionships if not good. Here and there may be found an isolated, solitary being, who delights only in the society of his bank-book and investment ledger; and, under the influence of false teaching, misguided souls may immure themselves in cells of La Trappe or other monkery. But solitary confinement is not the natural environment of human nature. God "setteth the solitary in families;" and does not He know and do what is best? Shall He set us in families here, and surround us with all the love and sweetness of the home, and then, when our time comes for going hence, send us, with natures unchanged and desires unaltered, to a world where none shall know another, a world, truly, of solitary confinement? The question answers itself.

But it will be more satisfactory if we consider what the Bible says on the subject of recognition in heaven. Before we do so, however, it may be well

to ask what kind of evidence we may expect from it on the question. Now, if you have studied the Scriptures carefully, you will have seen that where truths are clear in themselves, where they are written on the heart, where they are demonstrable without the aid of revelation, there are only indirect indications of them in Holy Writ. Just as there is an economy of miracle, so there is an economy of revelation. God does not rain manna from heaven on us as He did on the Israelites, nor is water struck for us out of a rock. We have no need of these extraordinary interpositions on our behalf, and therefore we do not get them. So you do not find in the Bible any laboured demonstrations of the being of a God, any set proofs of the immortality of the soul, or of the existence of a future state of rewards and punishments. Natural religion teaches these things, and so the Bible, as it were, takes them for granted. It is where truths are, so to speak, against the grain, or where they are beyond our unaided powers to discover, that the Bible speaks out plainly. It is very full and clear on the subject of the Atonement. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is clearly revealed. On faith, its nature and necessity, there is no uncertain sound given. But on such matters as we can ascertain without the aid of Revelation, it says little. Now, it is easy to see to which of these two classes of truths the doctrine of recognition in heaven belongs. Plainly it is one of those which, altogether apart from Revelation, man is inclined to

believe, and does believe ; for, as we have already seen, nations which never knew the Bible have formed a conception of it, and entertain a belief more or less definite regarding it. We may expect, therefore, that the evidence in favour of the doctrine of recognition in heaven to be found in Scripture will only be of an indirect and incidental kind. We need not look for express and formal statements on the subject.

Now, when we open the Sacred Volume, we find that it is even so. Its statements as to this doctrine are incidental. They are often general, and often partake of the nature of undesigned confirmations. But they are not less, but all the more, valuable on that account. Bearing all this in mind, let us look at some of them.

First of all, the Bible gives us plainly to understand that in heaven there shall be greater *knowledge* of all kinds than we have here ; and if that be so, there must be recognition there. It tells us that here “we know in part, and we prophesy in part ; but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.” Paul says, “When I was a child I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child ; but when I became a man I put away childish things ;” and he gives us plainly to understand that heaven, as compared with earth, will be the age of manhood in contrast with childhood. Still more explicitly he says—“Now we see through a glass darkly ; but then face to face ;

now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known " (1 Cor. xiii. 9-13).

The object and purport of such words are very plain. The Apostle wishes to contrast our future with our present. Here our knowledge is partial, and incomplete, and imperfect. It is only the knowledge of a child. It is as different from what shall be, as the reflection of an object in a mirror in a dim and indistinct light is different from the object itself; or as the full knowledge of manhood is from the elementary attainments of the benches of an infant school. Instead, therefore, of losing any knowledge which we have here, we may justly expect to have our stock immensely increased in the future. I believe we shall know the Bible better in the world to come than ever we could do here. We shall discover meanings and depths in it of which we are now quite unaware, and many difficulties in it, which now sometimes puzzle us, shall disappear. Not only so, but it may be expected that we shall know the whole universe better. Is it conceivable, then, that while going on to gain knowledge of other kinds, we shall lose our present knowledge of one another? "It is a question," says Richard Baxter, "with some whether we shall know each other in heaven or no. Surely there shall no knowledge cease which now we have, but only that which implieth our imperfection. And what imperfection can this imply? Nay, our present knowledge shall be increased beyond belief. It shall

indeed be done away, but as the light of the candle and stars is done away by the rising sun, which is more properly a doing away of our ignorance than our knowledge.”¹

There was a rough philosophy in the answer of an old Welsh minister to his wife on this subject. She was sitting in his study one evening while he prepared a sermon, and suddenly, her thoughts breaking out into words, she interrupted him with the question: “John Evans, do you think we shall know each other in heaven?” “To be sure we shall,” was the somewhat blunt reply. “Do you think we shall be greater fools there than we are here?”

Again, the Bible plainly teaches that there shall be greater *love* in heaven than there is here; and if that be so, there must be recognition. Look at the thirteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. It is one sustained and sublime eulogy of love. Paul penned many noble words in his day; words which live in history and linger in the memory; words which mould our life, comfort us at death, and translate us before the time into the ecstasies of eternity. But never does he write more magnificently than when he here tells the pre-eminent excellence of love. He says that, if we do not possess it, though we may speak with the tongues of men and angels, we are only as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. We may be clearest-

¹ *The Saint's Rest.*

visioned prophets, with such insight as shall pierce quickly to the core of all mysteries, yea, we may have the highest type and strongest style of faith; but all will be of no use without love. We may strip ourselves of every possession for the sake of the poor, may march unblenching to the martyr's stake; yet, if there be no true fire of love glowing on the altar of our souls, it will advantage us nothing. Faith is good. Hope is infinitely precious. But of the three divine sisters, Faith, Hope, and Love, by far the divinest is Love. As it is the divinest, so it will be the most permanent. Prophecies shall fail. Tongues shall cease. Our present imperfect earthly knowledge shall vanish away. But love shall abide for ever, purer, stronger, brighter in heaven than ever it was or could be on earth.

Southey sings as sweetly as truly,—

“ They sin who tell us love can die ;
With life all other passions fly,
All others are but vanity.
In heaven ambition cannot dwell,
Nor avarice in the vaults of hell.
Earthly these passions of the earth,
They perish where they have their birth.
But love is indestructible ;
Its holy flame for ever burneth :
From heaven it came, to heaven returneth.
Too oft on earth a troubled guest,
At times deceived, at times oppressed,
It here is tried and purified,
Then hath in heaven its perfect rest.
It soweth here in toil and care,
But the harvest time of love is there.”

Now, how should we be able to love each other in heaven without recognition? How can I love a man whom I do not know?

You loved that dear one, gentle reader, whom God lately took from you. How often you used to say—"Ah, if she were taken from me, I could not live!" But she was taken. You remember the hours of weary watching by her bedside—

"As through her breast the wave of life
Kept heaving to and fro."

The scene is fresh in your recollection as yesterday. You remember when the doctor told you she must die. The words smote you like a hammer. You were as one that dreamed. Could it be true? Yes, alas! too true. You can recall the ashy pallor that crept over her face as you sat watching—how the breathing grew difficult and fainter—the death-rattle came into the throat—there was a quiver, and in a little all was over. You loved her! Do you think when you meet her again you will not love her any more? Do you think that you will not even know her? Impossible as long as human nature continues what it is, as long as these words live—"Love never faileth!"

Once more, the Bible plainly tells us that *memory* will survive in the future state, and, if it does, there must be recognition. Three stages of that future life are described to us in Scripture. First there is Judgment. That memory will be in full exercise

there is plain. "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. xiv. 12). But how shall we be able to give this account of all the deeds done in the body unless we remember them? We shall remember them, and not only remember them, but memory will be then sharpened and intensified to a degree beyond anything we ever knew on earth, so that not an idle word spoken here below, or an evil thought indulged, much less a wicked deed perpetrated, shall escape its keen search. It is said that a drowning man, in the few moments of consciousness which supervene before he sinks into the dull oblivion of death, sees his whole past life flash before his mind with the rapidity and vividness of lightning. Perhaps there may be something similar before the Great White Throne. At all events, it is clear that memory shall there be clear and full. So will it be in hell. No one can read that awful scene described in Luke xvi., where Abraham sounds in the ears of the tortured Dives those knell-like words — "Son, remember," or can hear his dismal story of the five brethren whom he left behind on earth, and for whom even in hell he feels a keen but unavailing solicitude, without being sure that whatever else is lost in the dismal realms of despair, memory still survives unimpaired.

"But," says some one, "that story of Dives and Lazarus is only a parable, and no argument should be built on a parable." Will you be surprised to be asked — Are you quite sure that the story is a

parable? Probably you have always understood it to be; but, of course, you require better ground for your belief than that. Perhaps you imagine it is somewhere represented as a parable in Scripture. But it is not. Neither our Lord Himself nor the evangelist who records it calls it a parable. It is not introduced by any such parabolic formula as "He spake a parable unto them to this end;" nor is there any sort of hint given that it is not real history. Most certainly the onus of impeaching its historical reality lies on those who refuse to accept its statements as literally true, and perhaps they will find more difficulty in the task than they imagine. Calvin and many other expositors look upon it as an actual story of real life.

Even if it be a parable, do parables designedly teach falsehood? Are they untrue to fact?

It concerns us more, however, to know that there is memory also in heaven. Fortunately there can be no doubt upon this point. What is the song that the redeemed are represented as singing there? "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His blood!" Surely memory is implied there—the memory of the love of Jesus and of His great mercy in saving them from sin. Another picture in the Book of Revelation points in the same direction. We read there of "the souls of them that were slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held; and they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou

not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" There is surely memory again here. The point indeed hardly needs proof. It is almost inconceivable that in that bright world every one should be—

"To dumb forgetfulness a prey,"

and should have no recollection whatever of the life led on earth. It is clear on all grounds that such is not and cannot be the case.

Now, if there is memory in heaven, and that memory strengthened beyond anything that we have any experience of here, how is it possible that the saints shall not know one another? If, O mother, you will remember in glory the looks, and the fond loving ways, which the little one taken from you by death used to have on earth, will you not recognise that little one again when you two meet in the golden street? Surely you must and will.

There is one expression constantly recurring in the Old Testament which seems plainly to imply intercourse, and therefore recognition, in heaven. I refer to that oft-repeated phrase, "gathered to his fathers," or "gathered to his people." The argument from the words may not seem plain at first sight, but it becomes plain as we ponder their meaning. Of Abraham we read: "Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people" (Gen. xxv. 8). Of his son Isaac we are told: "Isaac gave up the ghost, and died, and was gathered unto his people, being old and

full of days: and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him" (Gen. xxxv. 29). Of Jacob it is said: "When Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed and yielded up the ghost; and was gathered unto his people" (Gen. xlix. 33). What does this so frequently repeated phrase mean? "Oh," you say, "what can it mean, but that those old patriarchs were buried in the graves of their fathers, their bones laid to moulder with kindred dust?" Well, whatever it means, nothing is more certain than that it does not mean that. How do we know? By the best of all evidence—the evidence of fact. Abraham was not buried in the same grave as his ancestors. Ur was his native place. Haran died there, and was probably buried there. Terah was buried in Haran, while Abraham was interred in the cave of Machpelah. Of Isaac, again, it is expressly said, that he was gathered to his people before he was buried at all, while Jacob's gathering to his people took place immediately after his death. In all three cases it is plain that the remark is not made with regard to the body, but with regard to the soul, the real man. If you have any lingering hesitation in accepting this interpretation of the phrase, it must be swept at once completely away if you look at two other cases of its occurrence. It is used in connection with the deaths of both Moses and Aaron. God said to the former—"Get thee up into this mountain Abarim, unto Mount Nebo, which is in the land of

Moab, that is over against Jericho, and behold the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel for a possession; and die in the mount whither thou goest up, and be gathered unto thy people; as Aaron thy brother died in Mount Hor, and was gathered unto his people" (Deut. xxxii. 49). Now every one knows that both of these men were buried in lonely graves, graves in which they were the first to lie, and the last,—Moses in that mysterious sepulchre which no man knoweth unto this day, where, as our Irish poetess puts it,—

"The angels of God upturned the sod,
And laid the dead man there,"

and Aaron in one equally solitary on the wind-swept summit of Mount Hor. Neither of them, therefore, was buried with his fathers or kindred; and, consequently, it is as plain as possible that the phrase before us, whatever it means, cannot refer to the disposal of the bodily remains. It seems clearly to mean, that when these good men departed this life they (*i.e.* their spiritual part) winged their flight into the spirit world, and entered into the society of their kindred who had gone before them. And is it to be supposed that they entered into that society as strangers going into the company of strangers? Does not the expression plainly convey the meaning to him who can see beneath the surface, that they entered into the fellowship of departed friends, knowing them and known by them?

That such, at all events, was the confident belief of those old patriarchs themselves seems perfectly evident. When Joseph's brothers brought Jacob the lying news of his death, the old man said: "I will go down unto Sheol (the spirit world) unto my son mourning" (Gen. xxxvii. 35, R.V.). It is plain that the broken-hearted father did not refer to burial, to lying in the same grave with his child, both from the word that he used, a word not signifying "grave," as it is rendered in the Authorized Version, but Sheol or the spirit world, as the Revised Version translates it, and also from the fact that, according to the heartless story brought to Jacob, Joseph was neither buried nor likely to be buried at all, since the report was that he had been devoured by some wild beast. Clearly the only comfort that the father could lay hold of lay in the thought of meeting and seeing his child again—

"Where the wicked cease from troubling,
And the weary are at rest."

Similarly, when David lost his baby, his consolation was: "I shall go to him" (2 Sam. xii. 19), *i.e.* in the other world. The comfort of both bereaved parents was just the comfort that is offered to bereaved parents still—that they and their children should be together again, together again, of course, in full knowledge of each other.

There are two singularly fine poetical passages in the Old Testament which one may quote, not so

much for the purpose of proving the doctrine before us, as of showing how universally the idea of recognition in the future world was entertained among the Jews. Both refer, not to the case of those happy souls with whom in this work we are specially concerned, but to tenants of the realms of woe. But what applies to one applies *mutatis mutandis* to the others. One of these pictures is given us by Isaiah, and is one of the grimmest and weirdest pieces of word-painting to be found even in his great book. It refers to the king of Babylon. He is represented as dead, and just entering the land of shades. The prophet-poet says: "Hell from beneath is moved for thee, to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. All they shall speak and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we? art thou become like unto us? Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee. How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, who didst weaken the nations! . . . They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying: Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; that made the world as a wilderness?" (Isa. xiv. 9-16). No doubt about the recognition there!

The other picture is from the pen of Ezekiel, and

resembles Isaiah's not a little. He says: "The strong among the mighty shall speak to him out of the midst of hell with them that help him: they are gone down, they lie uncircumcised, slain by the sword;" and then follows a wonderfully graphic and minute description of the denizens of that strange place. The whole passage is to be found in Ezek. xxxii. 21, and will well repay perusal. Its bearing on our subject is similar to that of the quotation just referred to.

Let us now glance at the teaching of some plain passages in the New Testament, in addition to those previously adduced. Already we have looked at various places in it which speak of the knowledge that will be in heaven, and the love, and the memory, and drawn our conclusions therefrom. But there are many other passages in which it is referred to. Among the rest, the account of the Transfiguration deserves notice. We are told that Jesus "took Peter, and John, and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And, as He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment was white and glistening. And, behold, there talked with Him two men, who were Moses and Elias, who appeared in glory, and spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke ix. 28). It has often been noticed how on this mountain-top the Law, the Prophets, and the Gospel met together. Moses represented the first, Elijah the second, and our Lord the third. What is more to our present purpose, however, we have

here three inhabitants of the heavenly world meeting, recognising one another, conversing together. Moreover, one of those three is a disembodied spirit, for it is not to be supposed that the corpse of Moses was raised from the grave for the occasion, while another was a man just as he had lived on earth, Elijah having been snatched up directly thence, without undergoing the pangs of dissolution. Now, at present all the saints in glory except a few are disembodied spirits. But by and by, when the resurrection has taken place, all will be in the body again. In this Transfiguration scene we have both classes represented, and it is noteworthy that notwithstanding the difference between the pure spirit and the man, body, soul, and spirit, there is no difficulty suggested as to mutual recognition or intercourse. Have we not here a little bit of heaven brought down to earth for a brief interval, showing us something of what its society is like?

Luke gives us a pregnant saying of our Lord which gives us another quick, brief glimpse into the realms of glory: "I say unto you, make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." What is the meaning of this verse? Apparently this: "the mammon of unrighteousness" is money. It is too often devoted to the promotion of unrighteousness, and hence it is here coupled with it. But with this money we may, if we will, make for ourselves friends who,

when we die, will be waiting at the portals of heaven to welcome us to our home. How? Why, if, instead of spending all our money on self-gratification, instead of hoarding it up, we so use it in the promotion of Christian work that souls are reclaimed from sin and "made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light," we become the means of peopling the "everlasting habitations" with tenants who have reason to regard us as their truest friends. You build a church, let us suppose, with some of the wealth which God has given you. Your "mammon" thus becomes the instrument of gathering souls to the Redeemer. The Gospel preached within the hallowed walls draws them, and your money was at the foundation of the enterprise. So they pass into heaven, and in eternity they await your coming. You have been their friend, and they have been made your friends by your wise use of your means. Or look at a case of a smaller kind. You expend a few shillings on the purchase of religious books, and expend some of your time in their distribution. By means of one of them a soul is gained for the Lord, and hails you as, under God, his deliverer. He dies, and by and by you follow him into the spirit world. When you yourself by and by wing your flight home, he is waiting to "receive you into everlasting habitations." Will there not be recognition between him and you? How can he welcome and thank you if he does not recognise you?

Is not the doctrine of recognition most plainly implied again in that sublime passage which has, by the side of so many an open grave, brought comfort to the mourning heart: "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others who have no hope; for if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him"? What comfort would there be in God bringing back His sleepers from the grave, if, when we and they met at His throne, neither knew that the other was there? Does not the essence of the consolation here preached lie in the seeing of our friends and the recognising of them as alive again, and in the prospect of an everlasting, uninterrupted fellowship with them?

The Scriptures seem, indeed, to have one voice, and only one, on this subject. Old Testament and New, prophets and apostles and our Master Himself, speak the same language regarding it. All tell us in the plainest terms that in heaven, far from not knowing each other, we shall know with a more intimate, clear-sighted knowledge than ever we had on earth. The yearnings of our own hearts and our instinctive feelings had prepared us for such a revelation. It fills up that which was wanting for us, and we are comforted to learn from the sure word of prophecy what otherwise we might only have guessed, that we and our beloved shall not be strangers above, but shall "know even as also we are known."

CHAPTER IX.

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Common Objections to the Doctrine of Recognition in Heaven.

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COMMON OBJECTIONS TO THE DOCTRINE OF RECOGNITION IN HEAVEN.

VARIOUS objections have been urged against the doctrine of recognition in heaven, some of them of greater and some of less force; while some that have been brought forward are speedily found on examination to have no force at all. It is right that we should look these objections fairly in the face. They perplex some people, and prevent their enjoying, as they should, the delightful prospect of meeting and holding intercourse with their friends above. And they perhaps affect a still larger number who have never taken the trouble to acquaint themselves accurately either with the nature of the objections or with the replies which have been made to them, by remaining in a shadowy, undefined, unexamined form to darken their outlook into the great future. Let us, therefore, see what such objections really amount to, and how far they are entitled to militate against the reception of the truth we have been considering.

Perhaps it may be well to remark before doing so, that the mere fact of objections having been raised against this doctrine is no reason for rejecting it. If we are to abandon every belief which has been objected to, our creed will be indeed scanty. I do not know any Scripture doctrine whatever to which objections have not been made. Even the most fundamental articles of the faith have had difficulties in the way of their reception started. The doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Resurrection of Christ, our own Resurrection,—all these have had objections urged against them. But you do not therefore give them up, even although you cannot in every case completely meet the objector or explain away the difficulties which he suggests. You are still as convinced as you are of your own existence of the truth of every one of the doctrines I have mentioned. You feel that you have sufficient proof of them to entitle, nay, to compel you to hold them. The mere fact, therefore, that objections can be and have been raised to a doctrine, objections which, it may be, are weighty and strong, is not a sufficient reason for refusing to accept it. Even though you may not be able to dispose of them completely, you may yet be obliged to cling to it by the strength of its proofs.

The question in all such cases is, Are the objections of such weight and character as to render it impossible to hold the doctrine against which they are urged? Do they outweigh the evidences and proofs?

Placing these in one scale and the objections in the other, how does the beam stand? Let us see how this is as regards the matter now before us.

1. It is sometimes objected to the doctrine of recognition in heaven, that the body will be so changed at the resurrection as to render mutual recognition thereafter impossible.

Now, of course, our bodies will be changed, greatly changed, at the resurrection. That is the plain teaching of Scripture. "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed" (1 Cor. xv. 51). "The dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor. xv. 52). But the point to be settled is, what will be the character and extent of this change? Will it be such as to alter the features, to interfere with the general aspect, to make the person unrecognisable? Unless this is to be the case, obviously the argument based upon it proves nothing. It is fortunate that we can answer the question now put, and tell what is to be the character and extent of the change which will supervene at the resurrection. Our vile body shall be changed, "that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body" (Phil. iii. 21). "If we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection" (Rom. vi. 5). "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John iii. 2). Frequently and plainly this coming change is so described. The question then is, what was Christ's resurrection body like? It is the

pattern after which our resurrection bodies are to be modelled. What change passed over it after His rising from Joseph's grave? Well, He was certainly the same Christ after as before. For forty days did He not go about among the disciples talking to them as He used to do? Did He not eat with them, and appear and behave as He had always done? Did they not hear the same voice? Did they not see the same face? Indeed, to convince them that He was the same, did He not allow them to handle Him, to put their fingers into the prints of the nails, and their hands into His wounded side?

Perhaps you say you are not quite so sure that He wore the same appearance after the resurrection as before. You remind me, possibly, of some incidents which you think bear a different construction. You tell me of that evening of which it is said: "Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus, and stood in their midst, and saith unto them: Peace be unto you" (John xx. 19). You say His body must have become altogether different from what it was before He died, when closed doors proved no barriers to its progress, when it passed through them without difficulty into the room where the disciples were.

Are you just so sure that that is the correct account of what occurred? Your idea is that the

object of the evangelist in his description is to convey an idea of the mysterious way in which Jesus entered that room, that He came in in spite of the closed doors. But that does not seem to be his object at all. What he wishes to convey is, not the *way* in which Christ came into the room, but the time at which He entered it. It was evening, and the doors were shut to give the disciples a sense of security. But they were not so shut that they could not be opened, and nothing is said in the passage as to the Lord coming in in spite of them or through them—nothing whatever. Such an idea is a mere gloss of our own. It is not in the record.

Well, you say, granting that, it is clear that Mary Magdalene did not know Him in the garden, after the resurrection, though she had been well acquainted with Him for years. She mistook Him for the gardener. Evidently a great change must have passed over His appearance when that could be so. Now, did you ever read over carefully and attentively the passage in which we have this statement about Mary Magdalene not knowing Jesus? If you did, and marked the various points in it, you will not long hold by the interpretation now referred to. First, Mary Magdalene came into the garden that morning "early, while it was yet dark." The sun had not risen. Night and day were still struggling for the mastery when she passed through the gate and paced along the walk which led to the grave. Is it very surprising that in that dim, uncertain light, that

dark hour before the dawn, she did not recognise Jesus till He spoke? Would you or I have done so? Again, do you notice how it is said, "she turned herself," when He spoke to her; and when she had turned herself she knew Him? Does not this imply that before she had not been looking directly at Him, that she had been looking sideways, or perhaps not looking at all? Is it remarkable that in that position and in that light she failed to see who was speaking to her? Thirdly, we are told that she supposed Him to be the gardener. This seems to complete the proof that she had not really seen the person to whom she was speaking; for does any one suppose that the change made by the resurrection on our blessed Lord had the effect of altering His Divine features into a resemblance to those of a common working-man? The whole passage only needs to be attentively studied, and the effect of each detail to be calculated, to show us clearly that the conclusion drawn from it by some as to the complete alteration made by the resurrection on the appearance of our Lord is quite untenable.

Possibly, however, you remind me of another occasion, in broad daylight, when two of Christ's intimate associates walked with Him after the resurrection, and failed to recognise Him all the time. I refer, of course, to the walk to Emmaus on the evening of the same day to which we have just referred—the evening of the resurrection Sabbath. It is said that, as they walked along, Jesus came to

them and joined them in their walk, but "they knew not that it was Jesus." Here, you say, is it not proved that He was changed, when these two in open day could not recognise Him? But will you notice that the reason why they did not recognise Him is expressly given us, and it is not your reason at all. It is plainly said—"Their eyes were holden, so that they did not know Him." This explains all. They were supernaturally prevented from recognising Him. Had they been left to themselves, they would have done so. But "their eyes were holden."

We have the fullest discussion of the change which the body will undergo at the resurrection in the fifteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. St. Paul there deals at length with the whole subject of the future body, seeking to answer such questions as these—Can the dead be raised up with bodies fitted for a spiritual world? What sort of bodies will these be? Will they be the same as we have now, or what will they be like? In a word, to use his own language, "How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come?" If we attend to the answers which he gives to these queries, we shall be able to see for ourselves the nature of the resurrection body, and consequently shall be able to judge whether it will be so different from the present as to render recognition impossible.

Now St. Paul certainly teaches very plainly that the resurrection body will be different from that which we have now. Using as an illustration a grain of

seed-corn, he says, "Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die. And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain; but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him, and to every seed his own body. . . . So also is the resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor. xv. 36, etc.). In other words, what springs up is very different from what you sow. You sow a little hard brown seed; there issues from the soil a beautiful soft green shoot. So you lay in the earth a corpse, dead, cold, passionless; there will rise from the same earth something very different. In both cases "thou sowest not that body that shall be, but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him;" and the body which He gives, both to the grain and to the man, differs enormously from that out of and in place of which it springs. Paul puts this so plainly that there is no possibility of misunderstanding him. Whatever we may not know about the future, of this we are assured by his words, that when the graves open at the Great Day there will come forth from them something very different indeed from what you left there when the sexton shovelled in the earth over the coffin lid. The stalk of corn does not differ more from the pickle of oats than the body which will rise from the grave will differ from that which was put in.

Precisely so, argues the supposed objector to the doctrine of recognition, and hence my objection. If there is to be such a difference between the body

which my weeping friends will lay in the grave and that which shall meet their eyes when the solemn trump sounds to call me forth to Judgment, how will there be the possibility of recognition? If I am to differ from my present self as much as the green corn-stalk differs from the brown hard corn-seed, how shall I know myself or perceive my own identity, much more how shall others know me?

The Apostle, it is to be noticed, meets this objection. He has said, "God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him." To meet the painful misgiving which he foresees this statement might suggest, he adds, "and to every seed his own body." "It is to be such a body as God may be pleased to give, but still it is to be 'his own body.' It is to be a body which the individual himself, and all who knew him, may and must recognise as his own. It will be changed from what it was when the tomb received it—weak, wasted, worn. It will wear the bloom of summer life, instead of the cold wintry deadness of the 'bare grain.' It will not, however, be so changed but that the instinct of conscience will feel it to be the body in which the deeds of this life were done. It will not be so changed but that the eye of affection will perceive it to be the very form on whose clay-cold lips, years or ages ago, it imprinted the last long kiss of fondness."¹

Perhaps you say you cannot exactly understand this. It seems to you inexplicable that there shall be such a difference between the body at the resur-

¹ *Life in the Risen Saviour*, by R. S. Candlish, D.D., 167.

rection and the body now; and yet the two identical, and the one recognisable by a person who only knew the other. Now, as to the identity there is no difficulty whatever. My identity does not depend upon my body always consisting of precisely the same particles of matter. Even during life the matter composing our bodies is in a constant state of change. The processes of waste and repair are incessantly going on, parts of the system being cast off and others added, so that, it is said, you have now completely lost the body which you had seven years ago; you are inhabiting a different body altogether, and in seven years more, if you live so long, shall be inhabiting another, different again. Yet you are the same man that you were seven years ago. You have not lost your identity, nor will you have lost it seven years hence. Several times in these discussions the fact has been insisted on that the soul is the man—that the body is the mere clothing or house. The soul does not decay, or die, or require renewal like the body, and, it being the same always, I am the same; I preserve my identity unchanged. So at the resurrection, although “we shall be changed,” wondrously, completely changed, yet our identity will be unaltered; we shall be the same persons that we are now. The continuity of our lives shall be unbroken, because it will be the same immortal souls that shall return to the bodies from which they came out at death.

The difficulty of recognition by others, in the face of such a change as St. Paul describes, may seem greater.

But everything evidently depends upon the nature of that change which, he tells us, is to occur. Will it be a change in the form and appearance of our bodies? If so, then the difficulty is indeed great. Or is it to be a change of nature—a change which, while it will preserve the form and features, will alter, as it were, the inner texture of the man, change, too, all his requirements, and make him, while apparently the same, and in reality the same, yet different altogether. In a word, does St. Paul say there is to be any change of form or feature? Everything depends on this.

Let us hear precisely what he says. For he does not leave us to conjecture wherein the change consists. He describes it minutely: "It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body." There is his description of the change. What is the precise meaning of his words?

Plainly, they tell us that there are three attributes of our present bodies which will be conspicuous by their absence after the resurrection. Those three are corruption, dishonour, and weakness. Not only will these three things be absent, but their places will be taken by their extreme opposites. Corruption will give place to incorruption, dishonour to glory, weakness to power. The "natural body" is characterized by the presence of the former; but the

resurrection body will be a "spiritual body," and will be characterized by the presence of the latter. The resurrection body will never die. It will have none of the elements of shame which cling now to the fairest form, and make us instinctively wrap it up from view. It will be beautiful, fair to look upon, and this attractive outside will not mask uglinesses lying within, which now give truth to the proverb that beauty is but skin deep. It will be "all glorious within." Nor will its beauty be mere physical beauty, which, as we know, may now coexist with the most utter vileness of nature. The beauty will be moral and spiritual as well as physical. As one has said, "Nothing that can offend the most fastidious taste, nothing that can suggest by the remotest hint any thought, even the slightest, any idea, even the faintest, of impurity or shame, nothing that can ever cause a blush upon the countenance, nothing for which the conscious bosom need ever heave a sigh, nothing to disgust, nothing to repel, no latent sore or sickness soon to lie too open, no secret germ of what, when it comes out, may make the eye of tenderest love fain to look away, nothing of all that hidden corrosive poison which mars earth's brightest beauty, will be found in that body which, 'sown in dishonour, is raised in glory.'"¹

Then how signally will it be freed from the weakness which is now such a clog upon the wheels of our progress! It will never be tired, never sick,

¹ Candlish, *ut supra*, 190.

will never need to pause in its activities to recruit its exhausted energies, and shall never be deprived of those energies by violence or subtlety. On the contrary, all its powers will be enlarged and its activities accelerated, and its capacities enlarged beyond our utmost conception.

The Apostle, it will be seen, sums up the difference between the two bodies in a word by saying that the one, the present, is "a natural body;" the other, the future, will be "a spiritual body." Now what do these terms exactly import? It is comparatively easy to see what the former means. The natural body plainly signifies such a body as we have now, and as St. Paul has just described, a body which he has shown to be corrupt, dishonourable, and weak. This *σῶμα ψυχικόν* is simply a body suited to the natural life which is lived on earth. In olden times they spoke of man as being compounded of three elements, "body, soul, and spirit," viz. the corporeal nature of flesh and blood and bones, the *σῶμα* which he has in common with the lower creation; the vital principle or *ψυχή* animating this body, which he has also in common with the brutes; and the *πνεῦμα*, or mental and spiritual nature, which distinguishes him from, and raises him above, the lower animals. Now, our present body is a *σῶμα ψυχικόν*. In other words, it is a body specially adapted to this lower earthly life. It is fearfully and wonderfully made, and endowed with marvellous powers and great capacities. No one looking at it, studying the nice adaptations of

part to part, and of the various organs to the purposes which they were intended to subserve, can doubt that the hand that made it is Divine. But the same can be said, with the same truth, of the bodies of the beasts that perish, so that in this respect there is no distinction between us and them. Moreover, our present body is a body which manifests in no indistinct way its greater affinity to the animal than to the spiritual. It has two masters that it must at least try to serve, the higher nature and the lower. It cannot serve both at once. They are so different in the demands which they make so opposite, that this is impossible. "The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other." But it serves both alternately. Sometimes it is the vehicle of the one, sometimes of the other. Sometimes it is the minister of "thoughts that wander through eternity," sometimes the instrument of gross animal passion. Sometimes we cannot help exulting in the thought that we are made only a little lower than the angels; sometimes we have to confess that man can become only a little better than the devils. Not only so, but it must be confessed that the body is a far more willing and supple and facile servant of the lower nature than of the higher. Without any compulsion or training it lends itself to the service of the former, but it always requires strenuous effort to yoke it to do the bidding of the latter. "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh,

dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. . . . I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." No wonder that we are so often made to feel in this way that this is the "body of our humiliation," and that we have so often to groan out, with the same Apostle who speaks in the passage before us, "Oh, wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

There will be this deliverance when the natural body is changed into the spiritual body. A spiritual body does not mean a body composed of spirit. Paul's whole argument forbids this supposition. It is plainly to be a material body. It is to be like Christ's body, who could say, "Handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." Quite true it is said, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." That is explained, however, by the words which follow, "Neither doth corruption inherit incorruption." The phrase simply means the body as at present constituted. The spiritual body will be a material body, but a material body inconceivably higher than our present bodies. "Let a condition of things be imagined," says a writer from whom we have already quoted, "in which the higher spirit in man has a

frame as expressive of itself as the present body is of the animal soul or life, of which it is the exponent. For one thing, there is no more in that spiritual frame any tendency to express, any power of expressing, the emotions of the lower nature. It has no features, no gestures, no attitudes, no phraseology or vocabulary for giving vent to the ideas, desires, and feelings that relate to the functions of that animal life which is the lower nature. Nothing remains of that structure of the body which exhibits men here as having appetites and passions in common with the beasts. That is much. But more than that, far more, I gain. I find myself in a body that in its new structure is the very image of my higher intellectual nature, the fitting index and expression of the spiritual life which I have in common with Christ in God. In and through that body, the glory and the beauty of that high intelligence and spiritual life of mine shine as clearly and as conspicuously as my lower life reveals itself in the fashion of my present frame. . . . My natural body is not only inadequate as representing and explaining me, so that I cannot by means of it express myself as a spiritual man; it is no less inadequate as representing and explaining the outer world to me. I see as through a glass darkly. I hear as if a chaotic Babel of sound were ringing in my ears. I cannot safely suffer my bodily senses, even in the highest and purest exercise of them, to minister to my spiritual life. I must regard with jealousy what appeals to me through the

eye, even when it is riveted on the purest heavenly ideal that ever painter drew, and what appeals to me through the ear, even when it is ravished with loudest concord of heavenly harmony, or softest notes of 'grave, sweet melody.' But there is a spiritual body. What its senses are to be I cannot tell. How it is to receive impressions from without, and present these impressions to the spirit within, I know not. But this at least I may be bold to affirm, it will be true and faithful as that spirit's minister, and it will be apt and able too. . . . Lastly, besides being an index or outlet by which the spirit in man expresses itself, and an inlet or avenue by which things without reach the spirit within, the body is an instrument by which the spirit works. The present body is so. Its various organs and members, internal and external, are the tools which the higher principle of spiritual intelligence and thought, as well as the lower principle of animal life, may and must use. The body is the spirit's engine or machine for moving the world. It is so, however, as if the higher spirit got the loan of it merely from the lower animal soul. It is to that lower animal soul that the body at present properly belongs. It is fitted for the uses of the animal life. 'Be fruitful and multiply;' 'I have given you food,'—such is the original law of man's creation in the body. And for compliance with that law the natural body is constructed. Hence it is naturally at the disposal of the lower principle of mere animal life, whose

pleasure it executes and whose work it does, very much as the fleshly body of a beast or a fish or a bird executes the pleasure and does the work of the vital principle or living soul that animates it. When it has to execute the pleasure and do the work of the higher principle of spiritual life, especially of the highest spiritual life, the life of the Spirit of God in the spirit of man, the present body is, as one might say, on foreign service. No wonder it should be found in such service to be a somewhat cumbrous and clumsy instrument, an imperfect machine, an engine apt to go wrong, to break down and need repair, in the hands of the higher master, the mind, which, as if by courtesy and on sufferance, wields it. No wonder if that higher master often fails to wield it to the best purpose. All the less wonder if, for such precarious use as he has of it, the higher master has to keep up a hard fight with the lower animal soul, whose servant the body as now constituted naturally is. But give to the spirit in man—the spiritual principle which he has as redeemed by the Son and renewed by the Spirit of God—a body that it can call its own, and claim as its own, absolutely and exclusively its own; let it have a body with nothing at all of that organism which fits the natural body for the functions of the animal life; let it be a body wholly formed and fashioned with an eye to the uses of the life that is spiritual and divine,—how by means of such a spiritual body may the spirit or soul which is to live that life, be able

to realize in it its own highest ideal, and even God's highest ideal, of what is great and good! Sleepless, unfatigued, needing neither food nor rest, marrying and giving in marriage no more, 'made like unto the angels,'—with no animal wants to provide for, no animal passions to gratify, no animal weaknesses or wearinesses to yield to,—how may the redeemed in glory, with those glorious spiritual bodies of theirs, be ever plying the glad and busy task of acting out in full measure the impulses of their own spiritual nature, and doing all the pleasure of the Lord that bought them!"¹

What deep meaning, and high hope, and transcendent comfort are breathed in those words of the apocalyptic seer which tell us of our spiritual bodies—"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Rev. vii. 16). But, great as will undoubtedly be the change which will pass upon our bodies at the resurrection, there is nothing whatever to lead us to believe that it will be a change of such a nature as to interfere with recognition.

2. A second objection which is sometimes urged against the doctrine of heavenly recognition is that in the interval between death and the resurrection

¹ Candlish, *ut supra*, 203.

the saints are pure spirits, without bodies; and it is argued that while after the resurrection, when they have become embodied again, recognition may be possible, it could not be until then. It will be seen that this objection applies only to a portion of the future.

Now it may be said at once that it is not possible to explain all the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. Poor mortals cannot always say how this or that is or can be done there. We know far too little about the ways and the modes of life above to feel ourselves entitled to dogmatize on matters concerning it regarding which the Scriptures are silent. What are we—what is our poor philosophy, when confronted with such problems? But it will be noticed that several of the Scripture passages, which we have already quoted for other purposes, expressly recognise the fact that the heavenly spirits are not strangers to each other even now. The fact that this is so is enough for us. The mode of the fact may be inexplicable; but if we know the fact, ought not that to suffice us? We must be content to wait for the explanation of many things till we see no longer darkly in a glass, but eye to eye and face to face. Nowhere is the lesson of humility more forcibly or impressively taught us than when we are engaged in the attempt to understand heavenly problems.¹

¹ Mr. Birks confines future recognition to the time following the resurrection, making the intermediate state one of fellowship with Christ alone (*Victory of Divine Goodness*, 60). Surely he has no warrant for such a distinction.

There is a point, however, connected with this matter which it may be well to bear in mind. When speaking of angels, we saw that it is by no means so certain as some seem to suppose, that they are essentially incorporeal beings. They have on several occasions appeared on earth clothed with bodies, visible bodies, and we find no statement anywhere that those bodies were merely assumed for the time. Now, when we speak of the sainted spirits above, it does not seem that we are compelled to regard them as necessarily invisible or formless. They are certainly not invisible to other spiritual beings there. It may be questioned how far the idea of spirit necessarily excludes all idea of form. We know too little about such matters to be able to pronounce upon them, too little even to enable us to speculate with any degree of wisdom. But is there anything to hinder the spirits of our departed friends from still wearing, even in the spirit world, and while themselves pure spirits, the forms and outlines which they wore when living here below? Who can say?

3. Another objection which has sometimes been expressed against the doctrine of recognition is suggested by such a case as that of the woman who had had seven husbands, which some of the Sadducees once brought before our Lord. Their difficulty was this—"There were seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and died without children. And the second took her to wife, and he died childless. And the third took her; and in like manner the seven

also: and they left no children, and died. Last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife of them is she? for seven had her to wife" (Luke xx. 29). It is said—what a difficult, awkward, embarrassing case is here presented! Supposing the doctrine of future recognition to be true, how complicated and perplexed the situation would be! Besides, we are told, did not Christ's reply on this occasion appear to indicate that we are not to expect in the future world such mundane things as recognition or mutual intercourse? He said to His questioners, "The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: but they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage: neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels" (Luke xx. 34–36).

Now we are, of course, content to abide by what Christ said on this occasion, or on any occasion. His word is truth. But the question is—What did He say? Well, there are some things which it is clear He did not say. He did not say—after the resurrection no one will know another. If He had made that statement, the question under consideration would have been settled for all time. But He not only says no such thing, He says precisely the contrary. He tells His Sadducean questioners that in the future world we shall be "as the angels of God in heaven." And do the angels of God in

heaven not know each other? Do all the ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of the heavenly hosts go about their duties solitary, unfriended, silent, alike unknowing and unknown? Of course not. No one could even conceive that this is anything like the life of the angels. What Christ says is, that in heaven there will be no marriage. This is clear. On earth the most important family events are the births, the marriages, and the deaths. In heaven all these will be alike unknown. There will be no passing out of life, and there will be no entering into life. As no grave will ever close over a departed saint, so no cradle will ever receive a new-born immortal. Here below, society is subject to the continual operation of the two counter processes of waste and repair. The grave receives its victims out of our homes, and our households from time to time receive fresh accessions of young inhabitants. But it will not be so in the world above. "The number of the elect will be accomplished" in heaven. None shall pass out of that number by death; and when once the judgment is finished, none shall be added to it. The two statements which our Lord here makes require to be taken together. The first is—they "neither marry nor are given in marriage;" the second—"neither can they die any more." No provision is required for keeping up their number, for that number will never suffer any diminution. But if any one has ever thought that there is anywhere in all this any

statement that in heaven there shall be no mutual recognition, we should like to know where in the words such a statement is to be found. To say that such a combination of relationships as would be involved in such a case as these Sadducees put to our Lord, would, according to our earthly ideas, involve embarrassment and perplexity is one thing. Boldly to cut the Gordian knot, and get rid of this embarrassment and perplexity by denying that any one will ever recognise his neighbour any more after death, is another and a very different thing, and one to which our Lord certainly lent no countenance either here or anywhere else.

4. Again, it is sometimes felt as a serious impediment to the confident acceptance of the doctrine of recognition in heaven, that if the knowledge of our friends in glory would give us pleasure,—and we shall be indeed changed there from what we are here if it would not,—on the other hand the recognition of those in heaven would imply the knowledge that others whom we loved were not there; and this sense of loss would produce a feeling of pain such as would dim the joy of the home above. Take the case of a mother. In heaven she sees around her some of her children. But perhaps she misses others; and, long as she waits for their arrival, they do not come, till at length the dread truth is forced upon her that some of her family are never to be there, but must have gone to be where God has forgotten to be gracious. Perhaps there was a prodigal in the family

He gave his mother many a sorrowful hour. But still she had her hopes that one day he would come to himself, and after all find his way by God's mercy into the heavenly home. Now she sees that such hopes are doomed to disappointment. She and her son are to be parted for ever. How is it possible, it is argued, that the knowledge of this fact—how is it possible that the reflection that a child of hers has passed away into eternal suffering—should not make that mother miserable and rob heaven for her of all its joys? The doctrine of recognition, therefore, we are told, cuts two ways. If it involves pleasure, it involves also a more than counterbalancing element of pain. For this reason it is asked—Would we not be better to give it up?

If the Bible, however, teaches the doctrine of recognition, we cannot give it up. Its reception may involve difficulty, but if it be true we must receive it notwithstanding. Just here comes in the caution as to the weight to be attached to objections which we ventured to suggest towards the outset of our consideration of this part of the subject. A doctrine may be open to objections, weighty objections, objections even which we cannot answer, and yet be true all the while.

What, however, let us ask, is the precise weight of the objection now referred to? Its substance is, we could not be happy in heaven if we knew that some near and dear to us were in the world of woe. It will be observed, however, that, supposing we

could, in deference to this objection, abandon our belief in the doctrine of recognition, we should thus only subject ourselves to a much greater evil than that which we wished to get rid of. Because, in that case, we should merely substitute ignorance whether any of our friends were saved, for certainty that some of them were not. Now, which would be worse, which would be harder to bear, which would be the greater trial, the eternal ignorance whether so much as one besides ourselves from our home on earth had reached the heavenly shore, or the knowledge of the worst, that some had not? If a ship has disappeared, on board of which have been many whom we knew and loved; if no tidings of her have ever come; if for weeks, months, years, we do not know whether one of all the crew and passengers has escaped,—if we are kept altogether in ignorance of their fate,—is not that condition of suspense regarding all felt to be tenfold worse than the certainty of the loss of one or two out of the number? Do you not say, Give me anything but this terrible suspense, for anything would be preferable? Well, remember that memory, as we have seen, will be in full play in heaven. We shall not be able to forget there. No sweet nepenthe will steep our senses. Remember this, and say if, to escape the possibility of the pain arising from the sense of certain loss in the case supposed, we have not substituted a worse and more intolerable evil in the eternal ignorance as to the fate of any

of our loved ones which you propose to give us instead.

Consider again this fact—our blessed Lord knows and will know in heaven who are saved and who are lost. This is beyond doubt. There are no secrets to Him. Now, is your heart more tender than His? Is your love greater than His, that you should suppose that, while His happiness will be undisturbed all through eternity by the knowledge of the lost, yours will? You do not argue that He cannot recognise the saved or know of the lost, else He could not be happy. And His love is as much beyond the love of even the tenderest mother that ever yearned over a child as heaven is higher than the earth. If this is not an argument which can be urged against His knowledge, can it be urged against yours or mine?

Look, again, at the case of the angels. They know all about this matter,—who are saved and who lost is clear to them. And their hearts are full of the purest and most unselfish love. They rejoice with an unspeakable joy over the repentance of one sinner. Yet the angels are perfectly happy, notwithstanding their knowledge of the lost. Shall we set ourselves up as tenderer, more loving than they?

Archbishop Whately thought the difficulty of the case was to be solved by supposing that in heaven we shall have the power of abstracting our thoughts from all disagreeable subjects. On earth, as we all

know too well, we cannot help thinking of such subjects, and too often fretting over them. We dwell, indeed, as a rule, more on what is unpleasant than on what is pleasant. If we have a hundred blessings to make us thankful, and one trouble, only one, we are sure to bethink ourselves of that one trouble, and forget, in contemplating it, our many mercies. We

“Murmur when our sky is clear,
And wholly bright to view,
If only one small speck appear
In our great heaven of blue.”

One dead fly spoils the entire box of ointment. If Whately's idea be correct, of course the difficulty now under consideration would disappear. We should be able in heaven not to think of our losses.

Others have concluded that in heaven we shall be so entirely conformed to the will and the ways of God, that His thoughts regarding the fate of our friends will be our thoughts, so that we shall not merely acquiesce in what He has done as right, but feel so perfectly satisfied with it that it will be able to cast no shade of sadness on our souls. This is the reigning thought in the lines—

“Fear not the prospect of the realms of woe
Shall mar thy bliss, or thence sad thoughts arise
To blunt thy sense of heavenly ecstasies.
There if thy heart with warm devotion glow
Meet for thy place, 'twill solace thee to know
No friend of thine 'mid those keen agonies
In that dark prison-house of torment lies ;
For none is there but, is of God the foe,

An alien thing from thee. The ties of blood
And earth's most sacred bonds are but a twine
Of gossamer compared with what is owed
To Him the Lord of all ! On Him recline,
He shall thy heart of every care unload,
He bid thy day with cloudless lustre shine."

I do not know how it will be. I know two things, and these suffice me. First, I am as sure as the Bible can make me that I shall know as I am known in the world of bliss. Second, I am equally sure, on the same authority, that in that world I shall be perfectly happy. As to the rest,—the how and the wherefore,—can I not afford to wait till I get there ?

5. Another argument is sometimes urged against the doctrine of heavenly recognition. It is said that the saints above will be so occupied with Christ that they shall have neither time nor heart for each other. It is to be supposed that that pious, if somewhat narrow-minded, woman is to be taken as a type of such people, who on her death-bed, when her husband was consoling himself and her with the thought that they would meet in glory, replied, "You might be for ages at my side and I would never notice you. Much as I love you, I will have something better to do in heaven. I will have my Saviour to look at and talk with."

Perhaps there are some who would sympathize with such a sentiment; some who think it, if not sinful, at all events earthly, to be anticipating friendship and fellowship with other saints as

among the great joys of the celestial country, who would tell us that we ought to be so taken up with the prospect of meeting Jesus, that other considerations of this kind would not occur to us. But, however one may respect the feeling from which such ideas flow, with the ideas themselves no right mind will have much sympathy. We shall, as we have so often had occasion to insist, be men and women in heaven, and this we should not be if we had there no feeling for or pleasure in each other. Are we not to love Christ supremely and above all others even here? Is it not said of this earthly life, that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and all our strength, and all our soul, and all our mind? Yet does it interfere with this strong love of God to love our neighbour also? Interfere with it! Are we not expressly told that we cannot love God without loving one another? We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and all our soul, and all our strength, and all our mind; but we are required in the self-same command to love our neighbour as ourselves; and we are told that whoso loveth not his brother whom he hath seen cannot possibly love God whom he hath not seen. "Whoso loveth not knoweth not God: for God is love," is one of the highest declarations of Holy Writ. So shall it be in heaven. Certainly, towering over, and overwhelming all other loves, will be the believer's overmastering love to Jesus. His song will be

continually of Him, and his adoration continually directed to "Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His blood." But that love for Him, instead of rendering impossible any love for another, would itself be impossible without such a love. We may be sure that in heaven the love for Christ which would not be accompanied by a love for each other, would be as incomplete and impossible as it would be here on earth, God Himself being witness.

None of the objections, therefore, to this doctrine of heavenly recognition are of such a nature as to interfere with our full belief in it, or our full enjoyment, in anticipation, of the pleasure with which it is fraught. You may safely reckon, O Christian, on meeting and knowing your beloved again. The Bible warrants you in so doing.

" I count the hope no day-dream of the mind,
No vision fair of transitory hue,
The souls of those whom once on earth we knew,
And loved, and walked with in communion kind,
Departed hence, again in heaven to find.
Such hope to nature's sympathies is true,
And such, we deem, the Holy Word to view
Unfolds; an antidote for grief designed;
One drop from Comfort's well. 'Tis true we read
The Book of Life, but if we read amiss,
By God prepared, fresh treasures shall succeed
To kinsmen, fellows, friends, a vast abyss
Of joy, nor aught the longing spirit need
To fill its measure of enormous bliss."

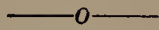
One practical lesson we should learn from this undoubted doctrine—we should take care what

friendships and connections we form on earth. The ungodly friendship will be quenched in the waters of death. Even that closest and holiest of unions, the marriage bond, will unite us only for a little, and be followed by an eternal parting, unless the marriage is a marriage "in the Lord." "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers : for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" (2 Cor. vi. 14). Such unions are bad for earth. What are they when heaven is taken into the account? A few short years of married life together—then an eternal parting! No,—

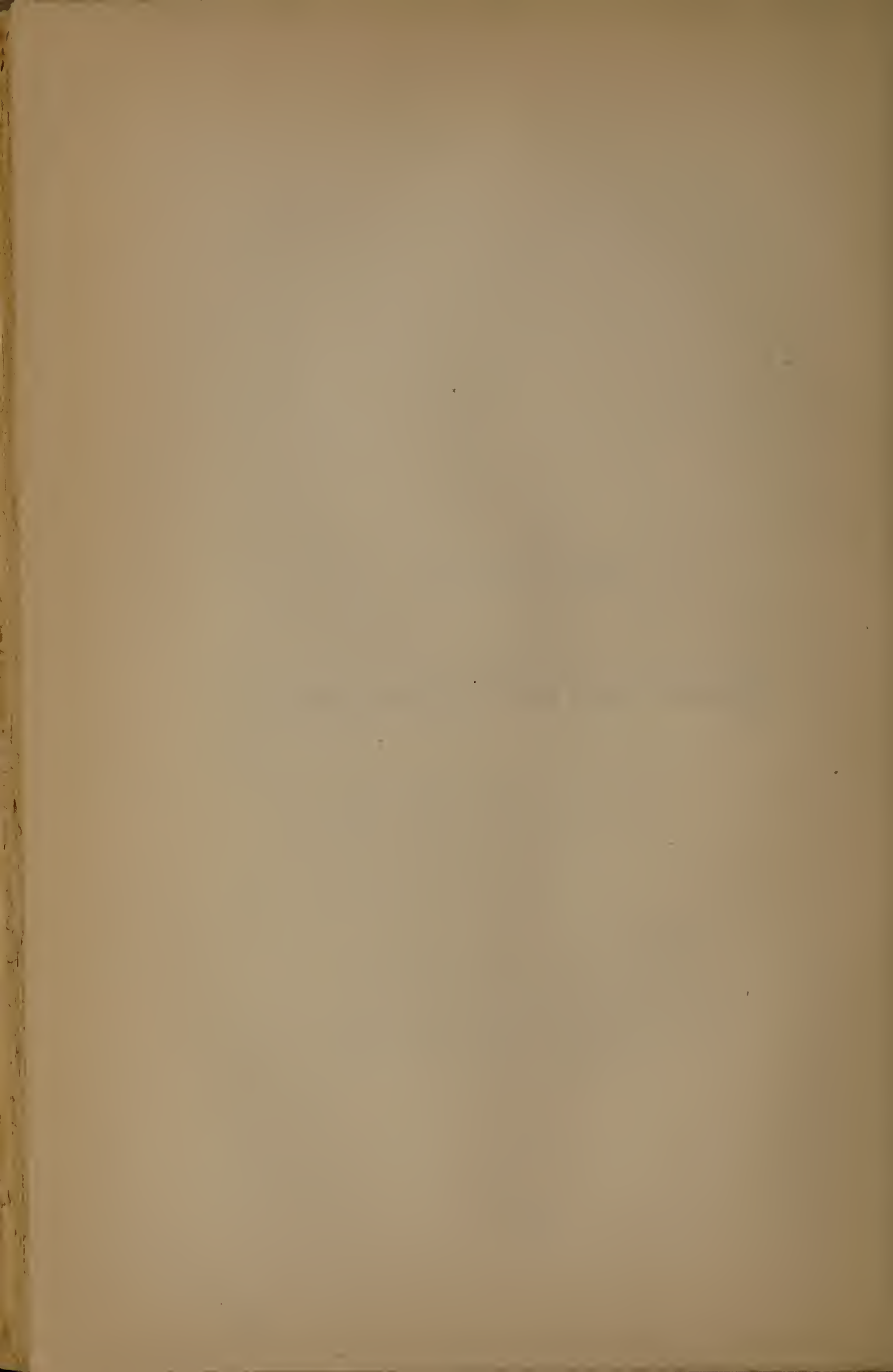
"If thou wouldst meet thy friends again,
Seek for them now at Jesus' feet.
If thou wouldst bind affection's chain,
Bind it to yonder Mercy-Seat.
If ye would be for ever one,
Be one in Christ, in Christ alone.

Then haste and make thee many friends
To meet thee yet in yonder skies,
And heaven for earth will make amends;
Where tears were sown, shall sheaves arise.
Friendships on earth are formed to sever,
But friends in heaven are friends for ever."

CHAPTER X.



Between Death and the Resurrection.



CHAPTER X.

BETWEEN DEATH AND THE RESURRECTION.

WE must not forget that before the final stage of happiness in heaven is reached, there will be an interval, longer or shorter—very long in the case of some, very short with those who die immediately before the general resurrection—an interval during which the spirit will be in a disembodied state. The earthly remains will be in the dust, and the soul will be unclothed. Now it is a very solemn and important question, where and in what condition will the latter be during that interval? If our arguments up to this point have been satisfactory, we have a tolerably clear idea of the future state after the reunion of soul and body. We have considered that state in the light of Scripture, and have arrived at certain clear conclusions regarding it. But how about this interval which we speak of? Where and in what condition is the soul during the period between death and the resurrection? This is a different question from any of those which, in the preceding pages, we have been trying to answer.

After the Judgment all is plain. But this interval, which is to be before the Judgment is set and the books are opened—this interval between the moment when the soul is unclothed till it is again “clothed upon with our house which is from heaven”—this time, long or short, between death and the resurrection—what of it? Where is the soul then? The body is in the grave, where is the spirit?

One answer is—the soul perishes along with the body. When the clay tabernacle is taken down, the inhabitant ceases to be.

This is the doctrine of materialism, ancient and modern. According to it, the soul is a mere function of the body. There is no substance except matter, and no force except such as is a phenomenon of matter. Thought is but as electricity. What men call the soul is only a figure of speech. It has no reality, any more than aquosity has a real existence apart from water. Awful as such doctrine is, there are men who hold it. We are but as the beasts. They perish when their work is done, and so do we. Let us eat and drink like them, and squeeze what muddy, short-lived drops of pleasure we may out of what is called life, for to-morrow we die, soul and body, and there is an end of us for ever. There is no resurrection. This present life is all we are to have. There is no life after death.

If one were arguing with a materialist, it would not be difficult to meet him on his own ground in regard to these matters. He has been met there

over and over again, and the hollowness of his arguments and assumptions exposed. But this is not a book for materialists. We proceed on the basis of the Bible, and it is sufficient, therefore, for our purpose to ask the question—Where in the Bible is any such teaching to be found? Is not the whole of its theology based on principles which are as different from such ideas as day is from night? Clearly the Apostle Paul had such intellectual vagaries before his mind when he penned the fifteenth chapter of his First Epistle to the Corinthians. He knew all the mazes of Greek philosophy, to which speculations like these were not strange, and we may read his answer to them in such words as these: “If Christ be preached that He rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen. And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ: whom He raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them

that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."

That is one argument. Here is another—

"What shall they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead? And why stand we in jeopardy every hour? I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me if the dead rise not? Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die." Then he sums up his examination of this cold and cheerless philosophy with the following confident and sublime apostrophe—"The trumpet shall sound; and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. xv.). Such words are best left in their own peerless sublimity. One thing plainly they show—that Paul had no belief

whatever in the miserable doctrine that the soul perishes when the body dies.

Neither had our blessed Lord. Passage after passage might be adduced from the Gospels to show this. Let one suffice. He was once asked an entangling question by the Sadducees as to what would be after the resurrection—a question to which we have already referred. The Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection, and they thought to reduce His teaching about it to an absurdity. After turning the tables upon them, and showing their gross ignorance of the subject they were talking of, He adds—“Now, that the dead are raised even Moses showed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For He is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto Him” (Luke xx. 37). If we believe Christ, the soul does not perish at death. There will be a resurrection as surely as there was a dissolution, and between dissolution and resurrection “all live.” Does it matter much what any man says to the contrary, when we have our Lord’s plain, strong, precise assurance that so it will be?

No! Wherever and in whatever state the soul is after death, it is not dead. This spirit of mine, this living, thinking principle within me, is immortal. It cannot die. “Fear not them who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.” No man can kill the soul. Not even God Himself will.

Yes, say some, that is quite right. The soul does not die at the death of the body. It cannot. It is imperishable. But it falls asleep. It sinks into a condition of unconsciousness, and remains in this condition until the archangel's trump wakes it. So the interval between death and the resurrection is passed, and then begins the full life of the redeemed.

This doctrine of "the sleep of the soul" is not new. Eusebius mentions a sect which maintained it in his day. At the time of the Reformation it was so prevalent that Calvin found it necessary to write an essay against it. Socinus held it, and Archbishop Whately seems content to leave the question an open one. What is to be said of it?

No doubt the word "sleep" is used of death over and over again in Scripture. When Stephen was martyred "he fell asleep." Paul says, "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him;" and again he says, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." From this style of expression we have adopted our word cemetery, which means the sleeping-place—a beautiful name, surely, for the last resting-place of the dead. But the question is—What weight is there in this phrase, as proving that the soul falls asleep at the moment of death, and

remains asleep till the resurrection? I think the answer must be—no weight whatever. Evidently the phrase is purely figurative. And a very natural as well as very beautiful figure it is which calls death a sleep. You look at the dead body which lies outstretched in yonder chamber. How like is its appearance to that of a sleeper! The eyes are closed, every nerve and muscle are at rest. You could almost believe that it is really only a sleep. You fancy at times that you can see the bosom heave and can hear a quiet breathing; and even when you know that it is not so, that your beloved is indeed dead, no language seems to you so descriptive of his state as when you call it “the last, long sleep.”

Besides, the word sleep is applicable for another reason. Sleep implies an awaking. When you lie down in your bed at night, you expect to rise again to the activities of life in the morning. It may not be so. You may never awake. Ere morning, the sleep which is death's facsimile may merge into the sleep of death itself. But usually there is an awaking from “the taking of rest in sleep.” We always expect such an awaking. And so with death. When we perform the last kindly offices to our departed, when we close their eyes and compose their limbs and lay them to rest in the narrow bed, and deposit the narrow bed in the narrow house, we expect those eyes one day to open again, and that frame now so quiet to be instinct with life. “Thy

dead men shall live; together with my dead body shall they arise." The sleep of the grave may be long, but it will not be for ever. "All they that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake."

All this precious and comfortable teaching is wrapped up in that word "sleep." But it is surely to build a pyramid on a point to draw from such a poetical expression, beautiful and significant though it be, the conclusion that at death the soul sinks into a state of unconsciousness and oblivion, and so remains till the resurrection. We must have more evidence for such a conclusion than a poetic phrase; but, as a matter of fact, there is no more evidence for it. In all the Bible there is nothing more in its favour, absolutely nothing. On the contrary, the condition of the departed is uniformly represented as a condition of activity—of rest, indeed, but that rest a busy rest. "They rest from their labours," but "they rest not, day nor night." They are "before the throne of God, and praise Him day and night in His temple."

Another theory of the destiny of the soul between death and the resurrection points to Purgatory as its possible abode. Roman Catholics teach that all who die in the peace of the Church, but are not perfect, pass thither. Those who are perfect are taken at once to heaven. Purgatory, they say, is a place of suffering,—suffering intended to serve two purposes, expiation and purification. The duration and intensity of this suffering are in proportion to

guilt. It has no definite limit. It may only last a few hours, or it may go on for ten thousand years. The sufferers may be helped and their sufferings alleviated or shortened by the prayers of the faithful, and by the performance of masses on their behalf. The Pope and his subordinates have the power of Purgatory, and can detain souls in it, release them from it, and add to or diminish their pains at pleasure.

Now the question which arises to most people's lips about all this is, where is it to be found in the Bible? Echo answers—Where? There is no such thing in the Sacred Volume from beginning to end. The word Purgatory is not once found in its pages; and all this fine-spun doctrine about it and its sufferings, and the mode of obtaining relief from it, wherever it comes from, is certainly not derived from Holy Writ. From Holy Writ! No, certainly, such doctrine is completely, distinctly, awfully opposed to its clearest teachings. According to the doctrine of Purgatory, the sinner is, amid its fires, to make expiation for his sins. But the Bible tells us of a far different expiation. "This Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God" (Heb. x. 12). "Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood, He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal

redemption for us" (Heb. ix. 11). If there is one thing taught in the Bible more clearly than another, it is that if any man goes with his sins to Jesus he has them forgiven, and more than forgiven, and that if not forgiven thus, they can never be forgiven at all. He Himself says, "Him that cometh unto me I will in nowise cast out." There is a priest needed, indeed, for every sinner; but the priest needed, the only priest who can do anything for him, is the great High Priest, who is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God. "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin." If before you die, ay, if in the very moment and article of death, you take hold of that Blood, all is well with you, well for all eternity. But if not, if life is either sinned or trifled away without the Saviour, and if death strikes the sinner low without His being found, then all Scripture testifies that as the tree falls so it will lie. All the prayers and all the masses of all the popes and all the priests in the world, though continued for a millennium, cannot deliver him. His fate is fixed, fixed for ever. Roman Catholics admit that there is no Purgatory in the Bible. They are obliged to admit it, for the fact is patent. But if it is not there, if it is only a figment of the imagination, we must reject it. Our inquiry in this volume is, as the inquiry of every man must be who believes in a God and a Bible, what saith the Scripture? And, the Scripture being absolutely silent about Purgatory, and everywhere condemning,

solemnly and emphatically, such doctrines as it involves, we need not delay with it. Its refutation is written on its own face.

What then really becomes of the soul at the hour of dissolution? Happily, the Bible gives the answer so clearly that there can be no doubt about the matter whatever to him who is content to accept God's teaching. It tells us that at death the soul of the believer passes at once into glory. We can see this for ourselves with the utmost clearness, by looking at a few passages bearing on the subject.

First, we turn up that memorable saying of Christ to the penitent thief, "Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." What clearer statement on the subject could there be? Some people have attempted to nullify the force of the words by altering the usual punctuation, and reading them thus: "Verily I say unto thee to-day, thou shalt be with me in Paradise." But it is quite vain to attempt to put a puerile statement, such as this change would make the verse to be, into the lips of Jesus Christ. He never talked in such fashion. Where would have been the sense of telling the thief that He was speaking to him that day? The passage is clear to every one that wishes to understand it. The poor dying man had made a certain request of Christ, and had specified a certain time at which he wanted this request granted. He had said, "Lord, remember me," and had named the time

when he wanted to be remembered—"when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." Christ answers him, as He so often did and does, by granting more than the man asked or thought. He had prayed to be remembered at that dim, uncertain, possibly far distant epoch, when the Lord would come into His kingdom. "I will remember thee," is the answer; "but I will remember thee sooner than thou thinkest or askest—I will remember thee this very day. This very day thou shalt stand beside me on the floor of heaven."

But are we quite sure that Paradise means heaven? One does not like anything connected with a matter so important to be left in the shadow of a shade of doubt. Can we say positively that those words of Jesus were meant to convey to that dying man the assurance that ere that day's sun had set he would be in glory? Certainly we can. There are two other places in the New Testament where the word Paradise occurs, and in both its meaning is clear. The first is that in which St. Paul tells us of what was probably the most remarkable experience of his life. Here are his own words: "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, whether in the body I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth; such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth; how that he was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Cor. xii. 2). It is very plain

here that Paradise is either heaven or a part of heaven. The other place is in the Epistle to the Church of Ephesus: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the Paradise of God" (Rev. ii. 7). Although this is figurative language, can there be any doubt as to the meaning of the word Paradise in it? So, when Christ tells the dying thief that that very day he would be with Him in Paradise, there can be no question in the mind of any one who accepts the Bible as his guide, that He meant to reassure him with the comfortable thought that in a little while he would exchange the agonies of a cross for the glories of a heaven.

Another passage in which it is clearly taught that as soon as the soul of the Christian leaves the body it wings its flight into glory, is that in which the Apostle Paul discourses so eloquently of "the earthly house of this tabernacle" and the "building of God" (2 Cor. v. 1, etc.). He says, "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Evidently the comfort of this passage is contained in the fact that the soul is never to be left homeless. As soon as the earthly dwelling, the body, fails it, another is entered. This comes out even more clearly in the next verses: "For in this (dwelling) we groan,

earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life." We are never to be left naked. Deprived of the clothing of the earthly body, we are to be at once "clothed upon with our house which is from heaven." This truth is stated, perhaps, in its greatest strength and clearness in the words, "Therefore we are always confident, knowing that whilst we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" (2 Cor. v. 6-8). It is impossible to read these words, and to open our minds to their clear meaning, without seeing that absence from the body, or death, is at once followed by presence with the Lord in heaven.

Paul brings out the same truth clearly in the memorable words, "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better" (Phil. i. 21-23). Departure, death, is with him synonymous with presence with Christ in heaven. As soon as the one event occurs, the other blessed experience supervenes. Similarly, when Stephen was dying under the stones of his murderers outside

the gate of Jerusalem, we read that he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Evidently he expected that when his spirit would leave the body, it would be immediately wafted into the presence of Jesus. Then, to mention but one proof more, does not our Lord, in words already commented upon elsewhere, give the same teaching when He says, "Make to yourself friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail they may receive you into everlasting habitations"? When we die, those whom we have blessed by our beneficence shall, as it were, wait for and welcome us on the threshold of the palace above, at once.

Many more passages tending in the same direction might be adduced. But *cui bono*? Is not one clear proof as good as five hundred, especially when not one can be quoted on the other side? Yes, thank God, there is no doubt of it. "The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory." Immediately! As has been beautifully said, "There is not a computable point of time between the departure from earth and the entrance on heaven. It is not a sand-fall. It is scarcely the twinkling of an eye. There lies my friend, and death is upon him. The change has well-nigh come. I tremble to think what in an instant he must be. How unlike all he was! How extreme to all he is! I bend over thee and mark thy wasted, pallid frame; I look up, and there ascends before me an angel's form. I stoop to thee,

and just can catch thy feeble, gasping whisper; I listen, and there floats around me a seraph's song. I take thy hand, tremulous and cold, and it is waving to me from yonder skies. I wipe thy brow, damp and furrowed; it is enwreathed with the garland of victory. I slake thy lip, bloodless and parched; it is drinking the living fountains, the overflowing springs of heaven."¹ You stand by the bed and watch the moment of passing. The death-rattle sounds in the throat, there is a quiver, a little struggle, and all is over. Then—

“Oh change, oh wondrous change!
Burst are the prison bars;
This moment there, so low, so agonized,
The next beyond the stars!

Oh change, stupendous change!
There lies the soulless clod,
The sun eternal breaks, the young immortal wakes,
Wakes with his God.”

There is one statement made in Scripture regarding Christ which seems to introduce a little perplexity into this matter. St. Peter, it will be remembered, in his famous Pentecostal sermon, quotes some verses of the sixteenth Psalm and applies them to Him. He says, “David speaketh concerning Him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face; for He is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover, also, my flesh shall rest in hope: because

¹ Rev. James Hamilton, D.D.

Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption" (Acts ii. 25). He shows that these words refer to our Lord. He says that David "being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he, seeing this before, spake of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in hell, neither His flesh did see corruption" (Acts ii. 30). Do we not seem to be taught here that when Christ died His soul went not to heaven but to hell? So the Apostles' Creed states—"He was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended into hell." You say, how is this? In one passage we are told that Christ at death ascended to Paradise. Here, that he descended into hell. Did our Lord really go to hell? In any case, how are such apparently contradictory statements to be at all reconciled?

There have been those who have believed that Christ actually at death went down to the abode of the lost, and was there for three days. Some who have so held have been men of no small weight. Calvin entertained this view. He believed that Christ really at death went to the place of everlasting punishment; and that He actually endured in hell some of its terrible pains. He held that this was part of His atoning work; that, as He stood in the room of the sinner before God, He had to bear all that the sinner would have borne, and that so He

drank the cup of punishment on our behalf to the last dark drop.¹

Others, while agreeing with Calvin, that Jesus descended to hell from Calvary, hold that He did so, not for the purpose of enduring any of its torments, but for another end. They shrink from the thought that He ever knew anything, by actual experience, of the miseries of the lost. That conception is too awful. They tell us that His descent thither is explained by such a passage as Col. ii. 15, where Paul thus describes His work—"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it." This they explain to mean that when Christ died, and when He had thus finished the work, in virtue of which sinners were to be released from the penalties of a broken law, He went down into the realms of woe, not to suffer any of that woe Himself, but to proclaim exultantly there, in the presence of the arch-enemy, that his power was gone.

Others, again, have the idea that Christ descended into hell to preach the gospel to its hapless inhabitants; that no sooner had He yielded up the ghost, than a general amnesty was, as it were, proclaimed, and that He went down among the lost to preach this deliverance to the captives. So they read that

¹ See *Institutes* ii. 16.

much controverted passage in the First Epistle of Peter —“ Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: by which also He went and preached to the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water” (1 Pet. iii. 18). These “spirits in prison” are in their judgment the lost in hell, and their reading of the passage is that our Lord, when He had “yielded up the ghost,” went down among them and preached to them the gospel of His own grace.

All these various authorities therefore hold that Christ actually spent some time in the place of punishment after His crucifixion. They assign different reasons for His visit there. But they agree as to the fact of the visit. They hold literally by the words of the Apostles’ Creed—“ He descended into hell.”

Was this really so?

To answer the question, let us look at the meaning of the words translated hell in our Bibles. Here the English reader will derive much advantage from consulting the Revised Version of the Scriptures. If we look at its rendering of the passage in Acts, which we have already cited, we find that it translates it thus—“Thou wilt not leave my soul in Hades;” and when we look to Ps. xvi., from which

Peter quoted the expression, we find it translated in the Revised Version—"Thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol." These two terms, Hades and Sheol, are simply the original Scripture words—Greek and Hebrew—left untranslated, and transferred to the English version. The question is, what do they mean? Do they signify the abode of the lost, or what? On the answer to this question must depend, of course, our answer to the other—did Christ actually descend to hell from the cross?

If we take up the Bible—preferably the Revised Version—we make one discovery in a few minutes, viz. that the word Sheol does not necessarily or always mean the abode of the lost. Let us keep the term untranslated, where it occurs, and we shall see this easily. We begin at Genesis. There we find, *e.g.*, that pathetic story of the reported death of Joseph. When the news is brought to Jacob that his favourite boy is dead, that he has probably been killed by some wild beast, we are told "Jacob rent his garments, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted: and he said, For I will go down to Sheol to my son mourning" (Gen. xxxvii. 34). Does any one mean to say that Jacob thought his son had gone to the abode of the lost, and that he himself expected to be there also? A parallel passage occurs a little farther on. When Jacob's other sons wanted to take Benjamin

down into Egypt, the old man said—"My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he only is left. If mischief befall him by the way in which ye go, then shall ye bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to Sheol" (Gen. xlii. 38). Plainly the word does not mean the world of woe here, any more than in the former place. Among Job's words, again, spoken in his time of trouble, we read—"Oh that Thou wouldst hide me in Sheol!" Did the afflicted patriarch want God to consign him to hell? David cries—"My soul is full of troubles, and my life draweth nigh unto Sheol." Did he mean that he felt himself sinking into hell? Is any one going to say that in one of these passages the word means the abode of the lost? Yet the very same word, used in all these places, is used in that sixteenth Psalm, the meaning of which we are seeking to arrive at. If it does not mean hell in the other places, why here?

Now Hades is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Sheol. This is seen at once if we compare the words in Ps. xvi.—"Thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol," with the same words as quoted in Acts ii.—"Thou wilt not leave my soul in Hades." The word Sheol occurs sixty-five times in the Old Testament. In sixty-one of these places it is translated in the Septuagint by Hades, twice by *θάνατος* (death), and twice it is omitted. In our Authorized English Version, in these sixty-five places it is translated thirty-one times "grave," thirty-one times "hell,"

and three times "pit." These figures themselves would be sufficient to show that the word does not always, or necessarily, mean the abode of the lost; a point, however, which is already clear to us. Now, Hades being the Greek equivalent of Sheol, the meaning of Sheol is the meaning of Hades, and therefore, as Sheol does not always or necessarily mean the place of punishment, neither does Hades. So much is perfectly clear.

Well, you say, what is the meaning of these two words which are thus each other's equivalents? We have seen what they do not mean. What is their signification? They simply mean the unseen world. Every tyro in Greek knows that that is the literal etymological meaning of the word Hades. It and its Hebrew equivalent appear simply to denote the invisible region in which departed spirits dwell. That world has its two departments, and only two, one for the just and one for the unjust. Go back on the texts at which we have just been looking; insert "the unseen world" or "the world of spirits" in every place where Sheol or Hades occurs, and you will see how intelligibly they will all read. They will not read intelligibly otherwise.

Now, the point which we have to settle is, where was the soul of Jesus during that three days' interval between His death and resurrection? We know where His body was. It quietly slumbered in that rocky grave in Joseph's garden. But where was His

soul from the Friday afternoon, when He breathed His last, till, in the grey dawn of the following Sunday morning, He burst the barriers of the tomb? Remember that He had a true human soul as well as a true human body. You are not to imagine that the Divinity within Christ took in His case the place of a soul. The Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Divines, which refutes so many a heresy, ancient and modern, with its simple and sometimes apparently unimportant words, keeps us right on this point by saying that He had "a true body and a reasonable soul." Now when that reasonable soul was separated by death from that true body, whither did it go? The Bible makes, as we have seen, two statements on the subject. In one place it says that that soul went into Paradise, in another it tells us that it went to Sheol or Hades. Is there any contradiction between the two statements? None whatever. Is there any contradiction when two people say of a person setting out from our quay some evening on board one of the Channel steamers, the one that he is going to England, the other that he is going to London? The two statements are different, but quite consistent with each other. So with the case before us. Paradise, as we have seen, is heaven; and heaven and hell, the abode of the blest and the abode of the lost, are two divisions, the only two divisions, of the unseen world, which is called Sheol or Hades. Jesus, when He died, went to that un-

seen world; not to that dreary portion of it where miserable souls languish in despairing agony, but to Paradise, the other portion, whither at death the soul of the dying thief was wafted, and whither, too, all souls which, like his, are emancipated from the body and at peace with Christ, pass to be for ever with the Lord.

But what then, you say, is the meaning of that text which has been quoted from 1 Pet. iii. 19, and which speaks of Christ preaching to "the spirits in prison"? Who are those spirits in prison? When and how did Christ preach to them? No doubt there is a mystery about this statement. St. Peter says of St. Paul's writings that there are in them "some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest unto their own destruction." With this passage in his eye, St. Paul might very readily have retorted the charge on St. Peter, for probably no passage in all Scripture has been more bandied about among controversialists. There are many interpretations of it. We are not particularly concerned with them just now, because, no matter which of them be the correct one, no matter whether none of them be correct, it is plain that that which makes the words say that Christ at His death descended to the abode of the lost, is wrong. We know from His own explicit testimony that He went to Paradise. We have not the slightest hint that He left it to proceed to the nether world; and,

moreover, all Scripture assures us that in that nether world there is no proclamation of pardon.

“ Life is the season God hath given
To fly from hell and rise to heaven.
That day of grace fleets fast away,
And none its rapid course can stay.

In the cold grave to which we haste,
There are no acts of pardon past ;
But fixed the doom of all remains,
And everlasting silence reigns.”

I can find in the Bible no glimmer of a hope of a probation after death, or of a restoration of the lost to God's favour. No matter how much one may desire such a thing, no matter how despairingly guilty souls may clutch at the chance of it, we must be honest and faithful, both to God and man, and say we can find no trace of such a door of escape in all Scripture.

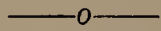
What then does St. Peter mean by what he states in this strange verse ? Well, he who should obstinately dogmatize on such a text would be a fool. There is one expression in it, however, which seems to us to be the key to its meaning—the words “ the Spirit.” It was by “ the Spirit ” that Christ went and preached to those spirits in prison. Apparently this expression points to the fact that it was not personally, but by the agency of the Holy Spirit, that He carried out this preaching. The mention of Noah, perhaps, gives another clue to the meaning. On the supposition that Christ descended into the veritable hell for the purpose of proclaiming pardon to the lost, there

would seem to be no reason why He should have singled out the lost of an antediluvian date for that favour; no reason for it, but apparently every reason against such a curious and invidious selection. But couple together these two undoubted facts, that it was by the Spirit that Christ engaged in the preaching referred to by St. Peter, and that Noah is expressly declared to have been "a preacher of righteousness," and a bright light seems to glow around the apostle's dark words. They appear to tell us now of those memorable hundred and twenty years during which Noah, patiently, and in spite of obloquy and scorn, witnessed to the truth of God. He was a servant of Christ. As a servant of Christ he was guided and helped by the Spirit of Christ; and being all this, it was not so much Noah's preaching as Christ's that rang across the world in those old days, and that was so scornfully rejected by the antediluvian sinners, and so, through the Spirit, Christ "went and preached unto the spirits in prison, who sometime were disobedient in the days of Noah." At all events, something like this seems to me to be the meaning of the passage.

To return, however, to the point with which we are immediately concerned here. When the Christian dies, it is plain that he goes, not to any Purgatory, for of no Purgatory does the Bible know anything; not to any dark and cheerless under-world, to sleep away the time between dissolution and resurrection, for no such sleep of the soul is recognised in Scrip-

ture ; still less into utter annihilation, for no such annihilation will there be. He goes "to be with Christ, which is far better," into Paradise, at once into his heavenly home. True, his bliss there will be shorn of its completeness until the resurrection. Not till the clang of the archangel's trump wakes his sleeping body and restores it to him, spiritualized and "made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light," shall he be again the complete man that he was on earth. But, withal, from the moment of his winging his flight from his earthly dwelling, he will be at once in glory, in his Father's house, in his heavenly home. Whatever is dark about the subject we are treating, so much is clear. Is it not enough?

CHAPTER XI.



How to get there.

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HOW TO GET THERE.

OUR discussions of the subject of heaven would be incomplete if they came to a close without giving some indication as to how the better land may be reached. We have inquired into its situation, we have seen its inhabitants, we have investigated its glories, and the questions ought to rise to many a heart and be anxiously pondered—Can I get there? If so, how? Let us conclude our inquiries by trying, calmly and dispassionately and carefully, remembering what interests are at stake, to give an answer to such questions.

You are anxious, then, let me suppose, to gain a place in heaven at last. But you are painfully conscious that you are not fit for its holy society. You read of its purity and its peace, of its unsullied allegiance to God, of the incessant delight of its inhabitants in doing His will, and then you scan your own life as honestly as it is in your power to do. You mark its deep-seated tendency to sin, and its many outbreaks of unrighteousness. You think

of your frequent unholy thoughts, of your unworthy acts, of your ungodly words. You see how opposite you are to God, how unlike that spotless company whose white robes symbolize their purity; and, as you do all this, you are forced, however reluctantly, to the conclusion that you are not worthy of heaven, nor, if you could obtain admission into it, capable of enjoying it. I take it that you are honest with yourself, that you really examine your heart and your life and your ways, justly and without prejudice in your own favour, and that you remember that no secrets can be hidden from Him with whom you have to do. Then, I say, the conclusion to which you must undoubtedly come will be, "Woe is me! for I am undone; for I am a man of unclean lips." "Unclean! unclean!" How can such an one as I am ever ascend into the hill of God?

Here is the case then. You are utterly unworthy of admission into heaven, yet you desire to be there. Desire? That is not the word. You would feel miserable at the thought of being shut out from it. Rightly and justly, you would reckon yourself undone, for you know there is but the choice between the bliss of heaven and the unutterable misery of the lost world. Yet how can it be? A street beggar longing for admission within the charmed circle of a royal court, does not seem indulging a wilder hope than you, when, with all your righteousnesses hanging about you as filthy rags, you yet aspire to stand in

that splendid company which surrounds the throne above.

Now, the question for you is, has God indicated any way by which, notwithstanding your unworthiness and unfitness, you may gain your wish and succeed in obtaining an entrance into heaven? That is the whole matter. If He has, then it may be done. If not, what hope can there be?

Well, God has spoken to us in the Bible. It is His revelation (the unveiling of Himself) to us. We cannot open it without seeing that its great purpose is to tell man his own story, to inform him what he was originally, to what state he brought himself, how his great loss may be recovered, how, coming from heaven, he may get back to heaven again. That is just what we want to know. It does not matter to us what are the thoughts or ideas of men on this tremendous subject. It is not with man we have to do, but with God. Heaven is His, and it is for Him to say in what way, if any, we, who are so unworthy of it and unfit for it, can obtain admission within its gates. Man may speculate and dogmatize on the matter if he pleases. He may reason out this or that theory, talk of the impossibility of this, the unreasonableness of that, the clearness of this other. You impatiently brush away all his speculations and conclusions. You say these may be true, or they may not—I want to know what God says on the matter. I am in His hands. Let me hear His voice. He has caused a book to be written to teach me

about these things. My concern is with it. Let me see if it gives me hope, if it puts me upon any plan by which I may look forward, notwithstanding my sin, to get to heaven when I die. "I will hear what God the Lord will speak" to me. "Speak, Lord, Thy servant heareth!"

In this mood you open the Bible, and it is not long before you discover that God has provided a way to heaven for the sinner. Side by side with the most vivid and humbling descriptions of your sin, you find the most comforting and reassuring statements of His mercy, and of His wish that "His banished might return" to Him. Dimly and slowly at first, but by and by more and more clearly, the truth dawns and grows upon you, that, bad as you are, your case is not hopeless, that, indeed, God gives you every indication of His pity for your condition, and of His willingness, yea, His anxiety, to see you restored to the high position which man once occupied. You find Him, not far from the opening of His revelation, proclaiming Himself as "the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Ex. xxxiv. 6). You breathe freely again as this blessed unveiling of the nature of Him with whom you have to do becomes clear to you. With each of these successive announcements of His mercy your hopes rise higher, and you begin to whisper to yourself that all may yet be well. But stop! What words are

these which come in at the close of the sweet strains which have been singing peace to your soul, words which seem to you like some funeral knell, tolling the burial of all your hopes just when they had begun to live?—"and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation" (Ex. xxxiv. 7). You tremble as you read. "Then it is all hopeless," you say. "I am guilty. I know it; and He says, 'I will by no means clear the guilty.' My fathers sinned before me; and, as if to leave me no loophole of escape, He declares that He will visit 'the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.'" You are beaten back to the earth in despair. You had thought to rise to heaven. But these words baffle and stun you, and seem to drive you down to hell.

Still your quest is too valuable to be lightly given up. So you rise again and stumble on, peering anxiously for any indication of a way by which you may climb those glorious but apparently inaccessible heights. And by and by there begins to break upon you some faint glimmering of a path by which you may. This feeble ray grows in brightness until, when you reach the New Testament,—the latest and clearest indication of God's will,—you discover beyond doubt, not only that there is hope for you,—of that you were long since

assured,—but you find how and why there is. There becomes firmly riveted in your mind one conviction, which at length gives definiteness to all your aims and efforts,—the conviction, namely, that all hope of heaven is connected with the Son of God. You find that, in addition to the revelation of Himself which God gave by means of a Book, He gave a further revelation by His Son, sending Him down to earth in human form, and speaking to men through His life and by His words ; so that while, as that Son Himself said, “No man hath seen God at any time, the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.” Here is a great gain for you. You have not only now a Book to guide your inquiries ; you have a Person to whom you can appeal, a Person who is the embodiment of Divinity, and is commissioned to proclaim and illustrate to man the nature and the will of Divinity, that he may know God better than he could ever otherwise have known Him, and may learn how he can get back to Him and up to His high dwelling-place. It is as if you had been sailing over unknown and dangerous seas in some frail craft, alone, with only a chart and the stars above to guide your steering, when suddenly there came to your side a pilot to help you in the difficult navigation. You have an instinctive feeling now that all will be well with you.

You question Christ on the point nearest your heart. “How,” you say, “may I, guilty, weak, and helpless, attain to yonder glorious fellowship in the

heavens? I feel there is hope for me. Once I thought there was none. Now I know there is hope. But it is a hope which is mixed with trembling. For, if God is merciful, long-suffering, full of pity and goodness, I hear the echo of those dread words ringing through every chamber of my soul,—He ‘will by no means clear the guilty;’ He ‘visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and to the fourth generation.’ Tell me, O Lord,” you say, “how to reconcile these apparent opposites! Tell me if my case is truly one which admits of hope, if I may really aspire to walk one day in those Elysian fields above.” You see the lips of the Great Teacher unclose, and the ready answer comes forth to you, ready and glorious, albeit there yet remains some mystery about it—“I am the way . . . no man cometh unto the Father but by me.”

This advances you a step, a great step, forward. It brings you to a point where you can stay yourself with the assured conviction that you have gained a clue to heaven which can never be lost. Christ is the way upward. He says so, and He is truth incarnate. And there can be no doubt, no mistake, about the matter, for He repeats the statement over and over again in varying forms, and it is confirmed to us by His apostles. All the voices of inspiration unite in assuring us that “there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved;” that “there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” Not

only so, but other modes of approaching Him, to which we might have been inclined to resort, are, one by one, cut away from us. We are told that we need not hope for any salvation by works,—that prayers, penitences, charities, however good in themselves, will prove vain refuges,—in a word, by a merciless process of exclusion, we are deprived of all other possible hopes of heaven; and as, in the first instance, we were expressly told that Christ is the way to the Father,—the only way,—so now all other avenues of access to Him are shown to be closed up, and we are forced, willingly or unwillingly, to the conclusion that no hopes of heaven need be indulged by any man except in and through Jesus the Son of God.

But how? In what manner do I walk on this “way” — how, precisely, does He avail for my acceptance with His Father? There is obviously something still to be learned, and for the learning I must go to the school of Inspiration again. As I sit there, if I am a docile scholar, there is gradually unfolded to me, in lesson after lesson, the great “mystery of godliness.” I knew before my unworthiness of heaven. But I find, as I study the matter, that the half was not told me. As I discover my sin,—inborn, deep-dyed, virulent,—the conviction deepens within me that indeed a great work must be wrought for me, and a great change produced within me, if ever I am to walk the golden streets. I learn that “the carnal mind”—my mind—“is enmity against God;” that it is

“not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” I find that “they that are in the flesh”—like me—“cannot please God.” I am taught that “the wages of sin is death;” that “the soul that sinneth, it shall die;” that “cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them;” and yet, that “there is not a just man upon the earth that doeth good and sinneth not;” that “there is none righteous, no, not one.” It is indeed plain, then, that my salvation must be wrought for me; that “the way” must be Christ, or some one like Him, who can do everything. Still, the question recurs—how? As I study on, I soon find how. I discover that Christ came down from heaven to take the place of sinful, undone man—to do in his stead what he was required to do—to suffer what he had brought on himself. I cannot doubt that, stupendous, almost beyond belief, though the truth appears. It is written as with a sunbeam all over the various chambers of the temple of Inspiration. As I traverse them, my eye lights on such golden inscriptions as these: “He was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him;” “He gave His life a ransom for many;” “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners;” “What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of

sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh;" "There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus;" "He bare our sins in His own body on the Tree."

But there yet remains one question to be solved, only one, but that one so momentous, that, unless I can obtain a clear answer to it, all the other information I have gained will go for nothing. I now see clearly that in myself I have not only no right to heaven and no fitness for it, but that I have such unfitness and such guilt, that I have wholly forfeited all prospect of it. I see, on the other hand, that "God is love," that He has no wish to see me banished from His face for ever; but, on the contrary, that He has a yearning desire that I should return to Him, and to the position which man once held before Him. And I see, further, how He has proved the reality of that work, and made its realization possible, by giving His own Son to die on my behalf. I gaze on the Cross. I fix my eyes on the pallid face of the Sufferer who hangs there before me. I reflect that He is the Son of God, and I can no longer doubt the goodwill of Heaven toward man. But now what I want to know is—How can I avail myself of that sacrifice which has been offered on behalf of such as I am? I take up my Bible again to search out this point. I find it clearly revealed that I must connect myself with that Sacrifice in some way. By various statements, and various forms of expression, it is made

plain to me that I have a part to play, not in making any kind of atonement for my sins, but in availing myself of the atonement which has been made. I find that there is such a thing as "neglecting the great salvation,"—such a thing as saying "Lord, Lord," and yet being shut out of heaven at last,—such a thing as "receiving the grace of God in vain." What am I then to do? Curiously enough, as I read I discover that the same question, in almost the same words, was asked centuries ago by another poor anxious sinner like myself—asked of an apostle. That is what I want, the answer of an apostle, of some one who can speak to me with Divine authority on the subject. Let me hear what it is—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." Believe? Yes—so it reads. But what is it to believe? I study out this point also. I search the Scriptures, and compare one with another to obtain all the information possible. At last I have it. I find that to believe on Christ is simply to accept Him trustfully as my Saviour, as a poor, self-condemned sinner to betake me to Him, and "receive and rest on Him alone for salvation." I resolve to do that. I am not satisfied merely to know the way. I must surely walk in it. I have at last found it. It is plain to me. I now take the lantern of the Bible in my hand, and tremblingly, perhaps, and feebly, but at the same time trustfully, and with a holy determination burning in my soul, set out

on another Pilgrim's Progress, my eyes fixed on the cross, and singing as I go,—

“Just as I am—without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come!

Just as I am—poor, wretched, blind,
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,
Yea, all I need, in Thee to find,
O Lamb of God, I come!

Just as I am—Thou wilt receive,
Wilt pardon, comfort, cleanse, relieve,
Because Thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come!”

As I go on, and near my journey's end, I look up and see that heaven is all peopled with just such as myself. Angelic fingers point to the shining throng and say—“These are they who came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and praise Him day and night in His temple. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat: for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them to living fountains of water; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

THE END.

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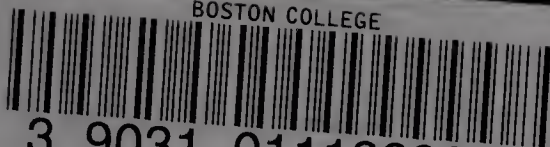
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